

**Bangor University**

## **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

### **The meaning of suffering**

### **An analysis of potential relationships between Buddhist thought and Kierkegaardian philosophy**

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# The Meaning of Suffering:

An analysis of potential relationships between Buddhist thought and  
Kierkegaardian philosophy

By Joshua James Andrews

Submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Bangor University

School of Philosophy and Religion

## Dedication

In memory of Nanny Daphers

The aesthete who left the party a little too soon.

### Abstract

Throughout the last three decades there has been considerable academic interest in the comparisons between Existential philosophy and Buddhism. For instance, numerous publications propose significant parallels between a range of Buddhist philosophies and the ideas of Nietzsche and Sartre, with comparisons often made between Buddhist philosophies such as *anattā* (not self) or the *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and Sartre's notion of "nothingness", or Nietzsche's notion of "nihilism". Whilst Nietzsche and Sartre have remained at the forefront of research into the relationship between existentialism and Buddhism, there appears to be a growing interest in possible associations between Buddhism and the ideas of existential philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard.

In complete contrast to the majority of research into the relationship between Buddhist thought and existentialism, analysis of the relationship between Buddhism and Kierkegaard is explored only fleetingly, usually as a subsidiary topic within studies of Kierkegaard's philosophy. This is to say, often Buddhism is employed by scholars of Kierkegaard to help explore themes of his philosophy in greater depth or to show his relevance to religious discourses outside Christian traditions. Whilst much of the dialogue between Buddhism and Kierkegaard in current scholarship seems to be cut-short—appearing briefly in short articles or mere paragraphs within works that are focussed on other matters entirely—the frequent pairing of these philosophical traditions collectively reveals substantial similarities between them. For instance, there appears to be rich overlap between the Buddhist notion of *dukkha* and Kierkegaard's notion of suffering, one that reveals suffering to be a fundamental aspect of human life, with the capacity to transform a person's perception of the material world. In each case, suffering appears to have the power to motivate a person, and to encourage

them to overcome selfish and materialistic desires, and in the process, discover true joy or satisfaction.

Whilst current research on the relationship of Kierkegaard's philosophy and Buddhist ideas have exposed a promising area for further study, it is also insufficient in its attempts to analyse the topic, and all too often arrives at erroneous conclusions. The complexity of Buddhist ideas often goes unnoticed, leading to reductive, mistaken definitions.

Furthermore, owing to the fact that research in this area is often presented within discourses that, in the main, seek to emphasise and elaborate the ideas of Kierkegaard, there has been little consistency in the specific Buddhist traditions and concepts that are examined, and in some cases, an unhelpful tendency to conflate Buddhist traditions as if they were all one and the same with no appreciation for their differences.

The intention of this thesis is to re-evaluate the existing dialogue between Buddhist thought and the philosophy of Kierkegaard. To do so, I identify and analyse key points of similarity and difference between the two. These include the relationships between Kierkegaard's *angest* and the Buddhist concept of *dukkha* and Kierkegaard's approach to human suffering and the Buddhist conception of *samudaya*. My thesis provides an invaluable counterbalance to existing scholarship in the field by placing greater emphasis on key Buddhist teachings in relation to Kierkegaard's ideas. This ensures that the important parallels between these two great philosophies and approaches to life can be analysed more accurately and in greater depth. Likewise, it enables a clearer appreciation of the various points of contention that prevail between the two. This thesis will challenge significant preconceptions that continue to be voiced by scholars of Kierkegaard, who fail to appreciate the finer nuances of Buddhist

doctrine, whilst at the same time, open up fresh, new dialogues between the works of Kierkegaard and Buddhist philosophy.

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## Abbreviations

Āṅguttara Nikāya\_\_\_\_\_AN

Dīgha Nikāya \_\_\_\_\_DN

Majjhima Nikāya\_\_\_\_\_MN

Samyutta Nikāya\_\_\_\_\_SN

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Opening Remarks

In his opening remarks to his 2008 edited volume *Kierkegaard and Japanese Thought*, philosopher James Giles suggests there remains a significant void in Kierkegaardian scholarship, with academics persistently ignoring the potential parallels that exist between Kierkegaard's existentialism and the Asian philosophical traditions.<sup>1</sup> Referring to the work of Roger Poole (1998), which details Kierkegaard's reception throughout the Twentieth-century,<sup>2</sup> Giles criticises the fact that scholars—such as Poole—have been keen to forge links between Kierkegaard and Western philosophy, but have largely ignored potential connections between Kierkegaard and Asian philosophy.<sup>3</sup> This neglect sets Kierkegaard apart from the other great existential thinkers, such as Nietzsche<sup>4</sup> and Sartre, whose works are routinely scrutinised through the prism of Asian thought, most commonly Buddhism. It is my contention scholars choose Nietzsche or Sartre over Kierkegaard in their comparative studies of existentialism and Buddhism due to an increasing secular bias in the West that favours the atheist approach of these philosophers. The works of Nietzsche and Sartre are characterised by their explicit rejection of the existence of God, and this has intrigued both scholars of Buddhism and comparative philosophers alike,<sup>5</sup> who utilise this atheistic stance as a point of comparison with Buddhism.<sup>6</sup> However, although Kierkegaard's Christian

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<sup>1</sup> James Giles, 'Introduction: Kierkegaard Among the Temples of Kamakura', in *Kierkegaard and Japanese Thought*, James Giles (ed) (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Poole, 'The Unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth Century Receptions', in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, Alastair Hannay & Gordon D. Marino (eds) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.48-76.

<sup>3</sup> Giles, 'Introduction: Kierkegaard Among the Temples of Kamakura', p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Georg Moller, 'The "Exotic" Nietzsche--East and West', in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* vol.28, no.1 (2004), pp.57-69.

<sup>5</sup> George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp.94-96.

<sup>6</sup> Joel Dinerstein, *The Origins of Cool in Postwar America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), p.265.

approach to existentialism has meant he is often side-lined from such discussions, and overlooked in comparisons between Buddhist philosophy and existentialism, it does not mean that intriguing points of parallel between his philosophy and Buddhism do not exist. Indeed, although few in number, there are a handful of Kierkegaardian scholars who allude—although often briefly—to potential parallels between Kierkegaard’s ideas and Buddhist philosophy. Prominent Kierkegaardian scholars, William McDonald (2011)<sup>7</sup>, Richard McCombs (2013)<sup>8</sup> and Sheridan Hough (2015)<sup>9</sup> are cases in point. However, their allusions are all too fleeting, and employed simply to further their analyses of specific aspects of Kierkegaard’s philosophy, or simply to state in bald terms that Kierkegaard’s work has relevance beyond Christian theology. This means that when comparisons are made between Kierkegaard’s ideas and those of Buddhism, they are usually as comments employed to support other ideas within Kierkegaardian studies, and often comprise little more than a paragraph.

Despite the limited academic engagement regarding the connections between Kierkegaard’s work and Buddhism, there are certain themes or ideas that are often mentioned by the scholars noted above. It is interesting to note that McDonald, McCombs and Hough (all of whom approach the subject from a Kierkegaardian perspective) have focused their comparisons on Theravāda Buddhism (sometimes referred to as Southern Buddhism). The Theravāda school—often translated to mean the ‘doctrine of the elders’—draws its scriptural inspiration from the *Tipiṭaka* (Pāli Canon), which scholars R. H. Robinson, W. L.

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<sup>7</sup> William McDonald, ‘The Dialectic of Moods, Emotions, and Spirit in Kierkegaard and Madhyamika Buddhism’, in *Acta Kierkegaardiana* vol.5 (2011), pp.100-108.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Phillip McCombs, *The Paradoxical Rationality of Søren Kierkegaard* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), p.80.

<sup>9</sup> Sheridan Hough, *Kierkegaard's Dancing Tax Collector: Faith, Finitude, and Silence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.128.

Johnson & Thanissaro Bhikkhu (2005) consider to be the earliest surviving codification of the Buddha's teaching.<sup>10</sup> The Theravāda school is often characterised as the most individualistic of the different Buddhist schools, in so far as it regards the path to enlightenment as an individual endeavour, whereby a person is able to gain enlightenment only through their personal dedication to the practice of the *dhmma*.<sup>11</sup> Unlike other Buddhist schools, such as those found within the Mahāyāna tradition, which often emphasise the need of practitioners to strive for enlightenment for all sentient beings, Theravāda focuses on the role played by the individual in their own liberation from *saṃsāra*.<sup>12</sup> It is this individualistic approach to liberation, I contend, that has attracted Kierkegaardian scholars to Theravāda Buddhism, for Kierkegaard, too, advocates a philosophical approach to life that is rooted in individualism, wherein a person's capacity to attain salvation is dependent on their own resolve to place God at the centre of their existence.<sup>13</sup>

However, whilst I recognise that the individualistic nature of Kierkegaard's philosophy, does indeed offer interesting parallels with the individualistic approach to enlightenment practiced within some forms of Theravāda Buddhism. It is important to note that Theravāda Buddhism is not a unitary phenomenon, consisting of numerous schools, with scholar of Theravāda Buddhism, Bradley S. Clough (2012) stating that each of the schools has their

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<sup>10</sup> R. H. Robinson, W. L. Johnson & Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Buddhist Religions: A Historical Introduction (fifth edition)* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2005), p.46.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.54.

<sup>12</sup> The term *saṃsāra* in Buddhism is held to be the continuous cycle of rebirth, a state of perpetual flux that is characterised by impermanence and is often contrasted with *nibbāna*.

<sup>13</sup> George Pattison & Steven Shakespeare, 'Introduction: Kierkegaard, the Individual and Society' in *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society*, George Pattison & Steven Shakespeare (eds) (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998), p.13.

own unique understanding or approach to the teachings of the Buddha.<sup>14</sup> As such, comparisons which focus on Theravāda Buddhism as if it were a single tradition, as opposed to an umbrella term which groups together numerous distinct Buddhist schools, have failed to recognise the diversity that exists within Theravāda Buddhism, meaning their comparisons are often guilty of making sweeping generalisations or presenting erroneous accounts of the Theravāda traditions. In order to prevent my own research from misrepresenting Theravāda Buddhism in this way, I have focused my research on the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and the teachings of the Pāli Canon. In doing this, I feel I am able to build on the works of McDonald, McCombs and Hough, in that I shall be able to examine similar themes to them, exploring Buddhist concepts such as *dukkha* (often translated as suffering), however rather than making simplistic generalisations concerning Theravāda Buddhism, I will instead be able to focus on presentation of such concepts within the earliest known codification of the Buddha's teachings. In doing this, I am well placed to evaluate and critique existing work in the field that employ this perspective, and to situate my own analysis of the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and the Pāli texts in response to their attempts. Furthermore, it is my contention that the most significant parallels between Buddhist thought and Kierkegaardian philosophy arise in the context of the Pāli texts. My research therefore focuses on Buddhist philosophy as presented within the Pāli texts, alongside the works of various commentators who have explored these texts within their historical and philosophical contexts.

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<sup>14</sup> Bradley S. Clough, *Early Indian and Theravāda Buddhism: Soteriological Controversy and Diversity* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2012), p.3.

A further trend, found within the works of Kierkegaardian scholars McDonald, McCombs and Hough, is to equate Kierkegaard's conception of *angest* (often translated as 'anxiety'), with the Buddhist conception of *dukkha*. The meaning of *dukkha* will be discussed at length within chapter three (see pages 90-115), however, it is important to note here that within that *dukkha* is complex aspect of Buddhist philosophy, that is often mistranslated to the English suffering.<sup>15</sup> The scholar of Buddhism Bhikkhu Bodhi (2017), states that within the Pali texts *dukkha* is not said to have one definitive meaning, but rather is term that can represent a host of different emotions and experiences. He continues that there are numerous English words that constitute different aspects of how *dukkha* is understood within the Pali suttras, for example he suggests sorrow, sadness, grief, displeasure; and even despair.<sup>16</sup> However, none of these words alone can capture the diverse nature of *dukkha*, instead (as shall be discussed in chapter three), it is best to avoid simplistic one word translations of this term, instead approaching the term as incorporating all the unsatisfactory aspects of "all conditioned phenomena".<sup>17</sup>

As such it is evident that when Kierkegaardian scholars McDonald, McCombs and Hough have equated *dukkha* with the narrow translation 'suffering', they have attempted to present *dukkha* as simply denoting mental anguish or psychological toil<sup>18</sup> with little or no attempt to explain the cause of these afflictions. These scholars therefore fail to acknowledge the breadth of experiences that are denoted by this term. Further to this, the work of Edward Benton (1984) discusses *dukkha* almost exclusively as the human fear of

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<sup>15</sup> Jamgon Kongtru Lodro Taye, *Chod: The Sacred Teachings on Severance: Essential Teachings of the Eight Practice Lineages of Tibet* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2016), p.547.

<sup>16</sup> Thubten Chodron, Bhikkhu Bodhi, Mark Unno & Konin Cardenas 'Understanding Dukkha', Lion's Roar, last modified December 17, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.lionsroar.com/forum-understanding-dukkha/>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Phillip McCombs, *The Paradoxical Rationality of Søren Kierkegaard* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), p.80.

freedom; its association with the human tendency to crave temporal pleasures is completely overlooked. By defining *dukkha* in such limited terms, McDonald, McCombs, Hough and Benton are only able to make overly simplistic connections between *dukkha* and Kierkegaard's concept of *angest*.

As I will make clear throughout my thesis, the tendency of scholars to associate *angest* with *dukkha* has been detrimental to previous studies into the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism. With the aforementioned scholars who make this association failing to give detailed analyses of these central concepts, as a result they misrepresent them, and arrive at reductive and erroneous conclusions. Likewise, by focusing exclusively on the associations between *angest* and *dukkha*, scholars fail to recognise meaningful parallels between the Pāli texts and other aspects of Kierkegaard's philosophy—especially, Kierkegaard's theological work. Indeed, because Kierkegaard's existentialism tends to be valued over and above his theology by scholars (such as those mentioned previously) who are also interested in Buddhism,<sup>19</sup> there are several significant theological works by Kierkegaard that go unacknowledged. This is unfortunate, as works by Kierkegaard, such as *Evangeliet om Lidelser* [*The Gospel of Sufferings*] (1847), provide an intricate discussion of Kierkegaard's understanding of the origins of human suffering, and how a person can liberate themselves from their suffering. As I shall demonstrate throughout my thesis, Kierkegaard's understanding of suffering and the liberation from suffering is an important and intriguing point of correspondence between Kierkegaard's philosophy and Buddhism.

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<sup>19</sup> Joshua Furnal, *Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.184.



The intention of my thesis, therefore, is to approach the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism in a new light, by providing a more thorough and accurate comparison of the concepts of *angest* and *dukkha*. Unlike previous scholarly attempts, my examination of *dukkha* will take into account all three distinct forms of *dukkha* that are presented in the Pāli texts. By approaching the comparison of *dukkha* and *angest* from a more informed perspective, I shall demonstrate some of the flaws in the works of McDonald, McCombs, Hough and Benton (among others), and their problematic attempts to unite both concepts in simplistic terms of psychological suffering. Moreover, I intend also to expose new areas of correspondence between Buddhism and Kierkegaard's ideas, through my original comparison of the two on the nature of suffering. I shall bring to light new parallels between the two systems of thought that are rooted in their common recognition that suffering is a fundamental aspect of life that has the capacity to inform and transform one's perception of the material world.

### Literature review

As I have mentioned, there are very few publications that take as their central focus the relationship between Buddhism and Kierkegaard's philosophy, due to the tendency in scholarship to align Buddhism and existential philosophy in terms of the philosophy of Nietzsche or Sartre. This, I have claimed, is most likely due to Kierkegaard's theological stance, and the emphasis he places on Christian spirituality. Kierkegaardian scholar J. D. Mininger (2011) maintains that Kierkegaard is frequently overlooked within academia due

to the impression that he was a “religious fanatic”.<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard’s religious approach to existentialism makes it difficult—on the surface at least—to align his ideas with the heavily atheistic tone that is so frequently associated with existential philosophy more generally.<sup>21</sup> In this respect, Kierkegaard is often overlooked in those studies that approach existentialism as if it were a united or cohesive philosophical tradition—which it was not and never intended to be.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the prospect of mediating the theological musings of Kierkegaard with the teachings of the Pāli texts—which do not discuss the existence of a creator God<sup>23</sup>—may seem like a daunting prospect.<sup>24</sup> This mismatch has led Kierkegaardian scholars such as Aaron Fehir (2015) to suggest that Kierkegaard’s Christianity places his philosophy “in conflict” with Buddhism. Fehir’s comment underscores the point that scholars in the fields of comparative philosophy have favoured the atheistic works of Nietzsche and Sartre, owing to the belief that their atheistic slants are a primary point of comparison between Theravāda Buddhism and existentialism more generally.

Despite the general silence towards Kierkegaard’s Christian approach to existentialism in comparative analyses between Buddhist philosophy and existentialism, Kierkegaard is occasionally mentioned in studies that focus on the relationships between Buddhism and Nietzsche, and Buddhism and Sartre. For example, scholar of Buddhism, David Loy (1996) who studies the relationship between Buddhism and Nietzsche, briefly notes a possible

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<sup>20</sup> J. D. Mininger, ‘Jacques Lacan: Kierkegaard as a Freudian Questioner of the Soul *avant la lettre*’ in *Kierkegaard’s Influence on the Social Sciences*, Jon Bartley Stewart (ed) (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p.195.

<sup>21</sup> George Pattison, *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.199.

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, due to its individualistic approach, ‘existentialism’ is not regarded as a specific branch of philosophy. Only Sartre accepted the term ‘existentialism’ as an umbrella term to bring together several ideas and theorists—and, even then, he did so begrudgingly. For more on this see Leonard Lawlor - *Phenomenology: Responses and Developments* (2014).

<sup>23</sup> Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, p.100.

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted here that whilst the Pāli texts do not discuss the existence of a creator God, they do describe a reality populated by *devas*. However, as will be discussed in more detail in footnote 613, the *devas* should be understood as temporal and subject to rebirth.

connection between Buddhism and Kierkegaard's concept of *angest* (anxiety).<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Wesley Teo (1973), who refers principally to the works of Sartre, employs Kierkegaard to further his discussion on the role of moral responsibility in Buddhism and existentialism. In the course of doing so, he suggests that Kierkegaard's *angest* reflects the human ability to recognise that each individual is responsible for their actions—an idea, he maintains, has inspired “all existential philosophers”—particularly Sartre—to talk about the anxiety a person feels when faced with their own freedom.<sup>26</sup> Teo continues to discuss this idea in relation to *dukkha*, by claiming that it is similar to the feelings of dissatisfaction that Buddhists regard as characteristic of all human existence.<sup>27</sup> Robert Miller in *Buddhist Existentialism* (2008),<sup>28</sup> makes fleeting allusions to Kierkegaard in his attempt to compare the Buddhist concept of *dukkha* with existential angst.<sup>29</sup>

Two trends emerge from these works. Firstly, despite their predominant focus on either Sartre or Nietzsche, these Loy, Teo and Miller still make brief allusions to the work of Kierkegaard. This is significant, as it reveals that, despite their decision to formulate their works around atheistic approaches, the aforementioned scholars nevertheless recognise that there exists a potential relationship between Buddhism and Kierkegaard, despite his Christian stance—something that they themselves refer to in order to further their own arguments and assertions. The second trend is that scholars, such as McDonald, McCombs and Hough, who primarily focus on Kierkegaard's work, have sought to find similarities

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<sup>25</sup>David Loy, 'Beyond good and evil? A Buddhist critique of Nietzsche', in *Asian Philosophy* vol.6, no.1 (1996), p.55.

<sup>26</sup> Wesley K. H. Teo, 'Self-Responsibility in Existentialism and Buddhism', in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* vol.4, no. 2 (1973), p.81.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that whilst Miller's work, deals with the philosophical tradition generally, he focuses more on the collective works of Sartre than any other philosopher associated with the tradition.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Miller, *Buddhist Existentialism: From Anxiety to Authenticity and Freedom* (Carlton North: Shogam Publications, 2008), pp.73-74.

between his conception of *angest* and the Buddhist notion of *dukkha*. This is significant as it establishes a consensus among scholars who compare Buddhism and Kierkegaard that suggests *dukkha* and *angest* resemble one another in terms of their suggestion that life is characterised by psychological turmoil, dread or anguish.<sup>30</sup>

Similar conclusions are also made within the field of comparative religion, particularly amongst a small number of publications that have attempted to forge points of parallel between Buddhism and Christian theology. For instance, in a conference paper, theologian Lynn De Silva (1980) associates the Buddhist conceptions of *dukkha* (which she defines as suffering), *anicca* (impermanence), and *anattā* (non-self) to Kierkegaard's *angest*. These associations are grounded in the idea that the *tilakkhaṇa* (the three marks of existence) reflect Kierkegaard's *angest* on the basis that both Buddhist and existential ideas that portray human life are distinguished by psychological torment and a sense of meaninglessness.<sup>31</sup> As I shall demonstrate in the following chapters, comparisons such as these are misleading as they misrepresent both the teachings of the Pāli texts and Kierkegaard's philosophy. I shall argue that any attempt to equate either *angest* or *dukkha* with suffering is to misrepresent the complexity of these terms, and in such a way that present both philosophical systems in unjustifiably pessimistic terms.

In similar terms to Lynn De Silva, the theologians, Huston Smith (1965) and Douglas J Elwood (1980), in their respective works, both maintain that *dukkha* and *angest* signify a state of dissatisfaction. While 'dissatisfaction' remains closer in meaning to the Buddhist notion of *dukkha* than the common definition employed in the works I have previously mentioned—

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.73.

<sup>31</sup> Lynn De Silva, 'Christian Reflection in a Buddhist Context', in *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology: Papers from the Asian Theological Conference, January 7-20, 1979, Wennappuwa, Sri Lanka*, Virginia Fabella (ed) (Ossining: Orbis Books, 1980), pp.97-98.

which is to say, ‘suffering’ and psychological turmoil—it continues to misrepresent Kierkegaard’s understanding of *angest*. As I shall explain in Chapter Two (see pages 51-66), *angest* does not express a sense of dissatisfaction with one’s life, but is an experience akin to angst that arises when one is aware of one’s freedom and moral autonomy. *Angest*, for Kierkegaard, is more than an emotion, it is an ontological state. For Kierkegaard maintains that it is only through *angest* that a person is able to recognise their freedom as the author of their own lives. *Angest* is a fundamental aspect of what it is to be human. This means that, unlike the Buddhist notion of *dukkha*, a person cannot be liberated from *angest*; *angest* remains with a person throughout their life as a constant reminder of their ability to harness their free will.

It is increasingly clear to me that the scholarship in the field is frequently dependent on inappropriate translations of key terms, which enable scholars, such as those previously discussed, to develop simplistic comparisons between Kierkegaard’s work and Buddhist thought that do not reflect the complexity of either philosophical systems. This is to say, scholarship in the field has largely developed out of word associations, through the perception that *angest* and *dukkha* are mutually linked with the English term ‘suffering’. As I shall argue, *angest* and *dukkha* express ideas that are far more complex than ‘suffering’, and that attempts to find correlations between Kierkegaard’s ideas and those of Buddhism are often skewed towards this simplistic explanation.

While the publications that have been discussed thus far have unfortunately failed to provide a detailed comparison between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, approaching it from an existential or Christian standpoint, making only fleeting considerations, comprising little more than the odd paragraph here and there, those few

that have approached the relationship from a Buddhist standpoint have done so with more extensive commentary. This means that while these publications are even fewer in number—amounting to several short articles and two monographs—they are more valuable, and offer greater insight into the subject. It is worth pointing out that these publications also proffer a greater diversity in terms of the Buddhist perspective, with a greater variety of Buddhist traditions represented—most often of the Mahāyāna schools of Buddhism.

Given my chosen focus on Pāli texts, the publications that approach the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism with reference to Mahāyāna traditions are not directly relevant to my study (as the Mahāyāna schools recognise a wider array of Buddhist literature). This is because most of these works focus on the Mahāyāna belief in the *Trikāya* (three bodies of the Buddha) in attempt to draw comparisons with Kierkegaard's understanding of God. These publications do not consider the Buddhist concept of *dukkha* and how it relates to the ideas of Kierkegaard. Rather, they tend to present the Mahāyāna schools of Buddhism in terms of mysticism, and the higher realms of consciousness. That is to say, Mahāyāna Buddhism advocates a system where the individual seeks to merge with, a higher form of consciousness, which resonates, in turn, with Kierkegaard's assertion that true Christians give themselves completely to God, sacrificing their identity in the process to lead a God-centred life. This line of enquiry is particularly prominent in the work of Jack Mulder (2006). In his book *Mystical and Buddhist Elements in Kierkegaard's Religious Thought* Mulder advocates a Kierkegaardian approach to mysticism, and asserts that, for Kierkegaard, the ultimate aim in life is to unite, or fuse, with God, so that the spiritual aspect

of humanity “returns to its creator”,<sup>32</sup> allowing the person to unifying “completely with the infinite”.<sup>33</sup> Mulder likens this approach to Mahāyāna Buddhism, which, he claims, seeks to unite its followers with the *dharmakāya*.<sup>34</sup> However, by coupling the *dharmakāya* with God, Mulder misrepresents the term, for the *dharmakāya* is not understood in Mahāyāna Buddhism as the divine creator,<sup>35</sup> and neither does it possess any of the personal characteristics associated with the Christian God. As the scholar of Buddhism, Shin’ichi Yoshinaga (2016) notes, the *dharmakāya* is a supra-personal consciousness that represents the true nature of reality, but not the creator of the cosmos.<sup>36</sup> Equally, Mulder’s work misrepresents Kierkegaard, for Kierkegaard never claimed that a person individual *merges* with God at the point of liberation. Rather, Kierkegaard proposes that a person seeks to establish a personal *relationship* with God, and thereby proposes a dualistic approach to salvation where the soul remains *distinct from* God.<sup>37</sup> The intention of Mulder’s work, therefore, seems less concerned with establishing a meaningful relationship between the ideas of Buddhism and Kierkegaard, and more in favour of illustrating the connections between mysticism and Kierkegaard’s conception of human relationship with God. This is evident in the fact that three of his four chapters deal exclusively with Kierkegaard’s approach to the nature of God and God’s relationship with humanity, while the final chapter attempts, briefly, to establish a connection between Kierkegaard and Buddhism.

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<sup>32</sup> Jack Mulder, *Mystical and Buddhist Elements in Kierkegaard's Religious Thought* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), p.107.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.109.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.201.

<sup>35</sup> Theodore Stcherbatsky, *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāna* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003), p.48.

<sup>36</sup> Shin’ichi Yoshinaga, ‘Three Boys on a Great Vehicle: ‘Mahāyāna Buddhism’ and a Trans-national Network’, in *A Buddhist Crossroads: Pioneer Western Buddhists and Asian Networks 1860-1960*, Brian Bocking, Phibul Choompolpaisal, Laurence Cox & Alicia M Turner (eds) (Oxford: Routledge, 2015), p.58.

<sup>37</sup> György Lukács, *Soul & Form*, Anna Bostock (trans) John Sanders & Katie Terezakis (eds) (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2010), p.51.

The comparisons between Kierkegaard and Buddhism that are sought from the perspective of the Mahāyāna tradition, clearly have a different focus to those that look at Buddhism from a more from the Theravāda tradition. That is to say, they tend to focus on the abstract aspects of the two systems of thought, often emphasising Kierkegaard's theology as opposed to his existentialism. Such an approach clearly differs from those discussed earlier within this review, as it fails to examine issues that are central to all Buddhist schools, by abandoning comparisons with *dukkha* in favour of exploring meditative states or advanced doctrines that are relevant only to the most advanced practitioners of the Mahāyāna school. As such, I feel that such publications have failed to acknowledge the more intriguing parallels that exist within the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism—notably, as I shall show—the affinities in Kierkegaard's theory of suffering and the *cattāri ariyasaccāni* (Four Noble Truths). I contend that Kierkegaard's theory of suffering and the Four Noble Truths are at the heart of the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism as their relationship reveals that both philosophical systems identify human nature and the process of human liberation in similar ways, which is to say, that the core beliefs of both philosophies are established on the belief that desire or craving is an obstacle to one's liberation.

Of all the scholars who have examined the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, it is the Theravādin practitioner and scholar Padmasiri De Silva who has published most widely in this field. De Silva, whose work focuses principally on the field of Theravādin psychology and philosophy, has routinely referred to existentialism to demonstrate the relevance of Theravādin philosophy in the West, and to demonstrate to his own readers how the central truths of Buddhism are echoed within contemporary Western thought. Whilst De Silva's publications on the topic of Kierkegaard and Buddhism are not



extensive, they include one short monograph, an article, and several discussions within his other works on Buddhism and existentialism. As such, he has written more than any other scholar on the potential similarities between Kierkegaard and Buddhism and has sought to move beyond simplistic comparisons rooted in erroneous definitions. De Silva has attempted to develop the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism by examining their respective critiques of pleasure. This line of enquiry forms the basis of his monograph and article—within which he concludes that Buddhism and Kierkegaard’s philosophy both recognise that the human pre-occupation with pleasure leads to immoral behaviour. De Silva thereby asserts that “pleasure is seen by the Buddha and Kierkegaard as rescinding our moral scruples”.<sup>38</sup> He also seeks to establish points of similarity between the *pañcasīlāni* (five precepts) of Buddhism and Kierkegaard’s conception of the ethical life outlined in his text *Enten – Eller [Either-Or]* (1843) and concludes that both systems of thought seek a harmonious society through the ethical actions of its people.<sup>39</sup>

While De Silva’s work introduces potential parallels between Buddhism and the work of Kierkegaard, he often fails to grasp the complexity of Kierkegaard’s central ideas. For instance, by interpreting Kierkegaard’s ethical life as one that denotes a code of ethics that Kierkegaard intends his readers to follow,<sup>40</sup> De Silva clearly misunderstands the intentions of Kierkegaard, for Kierkegaard’s writings on the ethical life are intended, rather, as a critique of those who have become identified with their societal obligations and their sense of personal responsibility.<sup>41</sup> As I will argue in Chapter Four (see pages 202-218), according to

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<sup>38</sup>Padmasiri De Silva, *Tangles and Webs: Comparative Studies in Existentialism, Psychoanalysis, and Buddhism* (Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1976), p.19.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.23.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> The majority of Kierkegaardian scholars maintain this position. See, for example, Ryan Kemp (2015), W. Glenn Kirkconnell (2008), C. Stephen Evans (2009), Peter Vardy (2008), Robert Perkins (2001).

Kierkegaard, a person who adheres to the ethical life ultimately fails to affirm their existence, as they have become consumed by their position in society, and are subsequently unable to sacrifice their worldly associations to establish a meaningful relationship with God.<sup>42</sup> While De Silva attempts to develop a new direction for the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, his conclusions are flawed by his failure to grasp Kierkegaard's intentions concerning the ethical life, and thereby lack the required precision with which to approach these two systems of thought accurately.

Having reviewed the relevant literature in the field, it is clear that the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism has suffered due to the failure of scholars to grasp key concepts in Kierkegaard's philosophy and the Buddhist tradition, with many misrepresenting concepts from either or both fields in an attempt to force parallels that they merely intuit. To rectify these failings, I intend to provide a rigorous and cohesive study of the relationship between Kierkegaard's conceptions of *angest* and suffering, seeking to explore how these distinct ideas share several affinities with the central Buddhist teachings of the *cattāri ariyasaccāni*. By doing this, I intend to demonstrate that meaningful parallels do indeed exist between the teachings of the Pāli texts and Kierkegaardian philosophy, and that, consequently, Kierkegaard can be considered alongside Nietzsche and Sartre, as having a significant role to play in the wider comparison between Buddhism and existentialism.

### Comparative Methodology

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<sup>42</sup> Avi Sagi, *Kierkegaard, Religion, and Existence: the Voyage of the Self*, Batya Stein (trans) (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), p.125.

My thesis seeks to establish meaningful parallels between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, drawing on the methodologies of comparative philosophy in order to present a rigours and innovative comparison. Comparative philosophy (also known as ‘cross-cultural philosophy’),<sup>43</sup> is a form of enquiry that examines potential relationships between philosophical traditions that stem from distinct historical, cultural, or regional heritages.<sup>44</sup> According to Robert W. Smid (2009), comparative philosophy seeks to “cross the boundaries of otherwise distinct philosophical traditions”,<sup>45</sup> in order to analyse the relationships between their “philosophical ideas, texts or aims”.<sup>46</sup> In this respect, for Smid, the field of comparative philosophy is best understood as the “comparison of philosophies”—with ‘philosophies’, here, referring to the various ideas, texts, or aims that provide the focus or context of enquiry.

Comparative philosophy has a complex history as a sub-field within the academic study of philosophy. Joseph Kaipayil (1995) claims that the term ‘comparative philosophy’ was first used in its “technical sense”<sup>47</sup> in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by scholars in order to emphasise theoretical similarities between Asian philosophies and Christianity. The scope of comparative philosophy has broadened significantly throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and 21<sup>st</sup> Century to concern itself with a wider range of philosophical traditions. A current trend in the field, for instance, is the exploration of parallel themes in the respective traditions of analytical philosophy and continental

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<sup>43</sup> Joseph Kaipayil, *The Epistemology of Comparative Philosophy: A Critique with Reference to P.T. Raju's Views* (Rome: Centre for Indian and Inter-Religious Studies, 1995), p.120.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.1.

<sup>45</sup> Robert W. Smid, *Methodologies of Comparative Philosophy: The Pragmatist and Process Traditions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), p.3

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Kaipayil, *The Epistemology of Comparative Philosophy*, p.1

philosophy.<sup>48</sup> However, despite the expansion and broadening of its application, the field of comparative philosophy continues to concern itself with an analysis of the similarities between Asian and Western philosophical traditions, and it is a comparison of these two, in particular, that remains a principal concern of the field.<sup>49</sup>

My thesis contributes to the field of comparative philosophy in its examination of the relationships between the philosophy of Kierkegaard and Buddhist thought (as it is presented within the Pāli texts). Thus, in its broadest sense, my thesis seeks to establish principal points of similarity and contrast between Western and Asian philosophy. Although this approach is, as I have suggested, commonplace within the field of comparative philosophy, studies in this areas are often criticised and found wanting in their misrepresentation of the philosophical or religious traditions they consider due to the cultural bias of their author.<sup>50</sup> It is vital, therefore, for me to ensure that I address my own cultural biases in my consideration of the philosophical and religious traditions of my study, and to represent them as objectively as I can.

My own cultural location and social bias may impact my research, and I have sought to address this possibility and limit its impact on my judgements where possible. What follows is a brief outline of my own cultural disposition, and how this links to theories of neo-colonialism, orientalism, and intellectual chauvinism—theories that one must acknowledge when considering the relationships between different philosophical and religious traditions from one's own vantage point.

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<sup>48</sup> A. P. Martinich, 'Meaning as Significance in Analytical and Continental Philosophy', in *Constructive Engagement of Analytic and Continental Approaches in Philosophy: From the Vantage Point of Comparative Philosophy*, Bo Mou & Richard Tieszen (eds) (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p.33.

<sup>49</sup> Ronnie Littlejohn, 'Comparative Philosophy', Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, retrieved from <https://www.iep.utm.edu/comparat/> (accessed December 15, 2017).

<sup>50</sup> Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.20.

I would not describe my own upbringing as 'religious' per se. However, I have lived my life, to date, within an area in the UK that has exposed me to many cultural practices which could be construed as Christian in origin. For instance, I celebrate Christmas every year, and while my celebration has not involved me attending a Church service or practicing any ritual that could be identified as a 'Christian' ritual, the impressions made upon me around Christmas time by the media has ensured that I am aware of the religious significance of the day that I celebrate as 'Christmas day'. By the same token, advertising and other forms of social media reinforce in me specific Christian values and customs during Christmas time, leading me to associate Christianity with the seasonal activities that I find myself participating in. Moreover, my school education was infused with Christian ideals, some of which were explicit, such as daily acts of collective worship, where pupils were expected to pray to the Christian God during assembly meetings. Again, this has ensured that Christian teachings have been reinforced within me, colouring my expectations and aspirations more generally. Thus, while I do not identify as a Christian, Christian values underpin my cultural heritage.

It is important to draw attention to the Christian underpinnings of my cultural heritage and my disposition that it has helped to fashion, as it could, for instance, encourage me to unwittingly favour the Christian philosophy of Kierkegaard or to treat it with greater sensitivity than the Buddhist teachings of the Pāli Cannon, which have impacted upon my cultural heritage to a much lesser extent. To ensure I treat both traditions on equal terms, I have refrained from making value judgements in either case, and I focus purely on theoretical comparisons *between* the two. My concern is not with *either* Kierkegaardian philosophy *or* the teachings of the Pāli texts, or on the supposed validity of each, but, rather, on their potential parallels and relationships.

My theoretical approach chimes with the critical thinking employed by other scholars working in the field of comparative philosophy. Throughout her writings, Sandra Wawrytko (2013) has argued that comparative philosophy identifies parallels between different philosophical traditions with a view to establishing a meaningful conversation between them that helps to further our human ‘search for truth’.<sup>51</sup> I am aware of the importance of recognising the potential limitations and difficulties that can arise when approaching two distinct philosophical traditions from a comparative perspective. When talking about “truth” or the “search for truth”, Richard Tieszen (2013) stresses the need to identify *whose* truth is being championed. All too often, he says, comparative philosophers fall into the trap of presenting their own biased system of comparison, which seeks—often unwittingly—to promote their own cultural norms or preferred philosophical tradition over the “other tradition”.<sup>52</sup> Edwin Ng (2014) explores this idea with reference to the postcolonial Buddhist commentator Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907). Ng claims that, although Olcott converted to Buddhism, Olcott’s understanding of Buddhism “reproduced distinctive features of liberal Protestantism”.<sup>53</sup> In similar manner to the work of Kaipayil, Ng suggests that when a scholar approaches a tradition that is distinct to their own, they are vulnerable to approaching it with a biased attitude that is coloured by preconceptions that derive from their own. As such, one could argue that it is impossible to extract oneself from one’s cultural prejudices

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<sup>51</sup> Sandra A. Wawrytko, ‘The Buddhist Challenge to the Noumenal: Analyzing Epistemological Deconstruction’, in *Constructive Engagement of Analytic and Continental Approaches in Philosophy: From the Vantage Point of Comparative Philosophy*, Bo Mou & Richard Tieszen (eds) (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp.229-239.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Tieszen, ‘General Introduction’, in *Constructive Engagement of Analytic and Continental Approaches in Philosophy: From the Vantage Point of Comparative Philosophy*, Bo Mou & Richard Tieszen (eds) (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p.3

<sup>53</sup> Edwin Ng, ‘Who Gets Buddhism ‘Right’? Reflections of a Postcolonial ‘Western Buddhist’ Convert’, last modified December 11, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/12/11/4146841.htm>.

and disposition and consider another culture or “other” tradition in a purely objective manner.

It is for these reasons that comparative philosophy has been criticised for its susceptibility to “intellectual chauvinism and delusion of cultural supremacy”.<sup>54</sup> Philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1997), refers to the act of promoting one’s cultural tradition to the detriment of others as ‘normative chauvinism’. In addition to normative chauvinism, Nussbaum warns her readers of the dangers of ‘descriptive chauvinism’, whereby a scholar refashions the values of other traditions to reflect their own.<sup>55</sup> Patrick Kane (2012) develops these ideas to suggest that both intellectual and descriptive chauvinism often take the form of a ‘neo-orientalism’ when they are present in works that attempt to champion Western philosophy over the “oriental other”.<sup>56</sup> Whilst, neo-orientalism is often associated with Islamic studies, due in part to the rise in Islamophobia since the events of 9/11,<sup>57</sup> the work of Rachelle M. Scott (2009) demonstrates that studies in Buddhism can also be marred by such bias. According to Scott, studies that compare different socio-economic models of Western and Asian orientation tend to portray Buddhism in derogatory terms as a threat to capitalism and associating it with Western conceptions of charity and piety.<sup>58</sup>

Throughout my thesis I have sought to avoid such bias by reflecting on the manner of my interpretations, and by drawing on the research and writings of leading scholars in the fields to help me consider the central theoretical concepts of Buddhism and Kierkegaardian

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<sup>54</sup> Ramakrishna Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy* (Abingdon: Abingdon Press, 1975), p.3.

<sup>55</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp.159-164.

<sup>56</sup> Patrick Kane, *The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt: Aesthetics, Ideology and Nation-Building* (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd., 2012), p.59.

<sup>57</sup> Dag Tuastad, ‘Neo-Orientalism and the new barbarism thesis: Aspects of symbolic violence in the Middle East conflict(s)’, in *Third World Quarterly*, vol.24, no.4, (2003), p.591.

<sup>58</sup> Rachelle M. Scott, *Nirvana for Sale?: Buddhism, Wealth, and the Dhammakaya Temple in Contemporary Thailand* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), p.13.

philosophy more objectively than if I had relied solely on my own analytical deductions. My analyses of the central concepts from both traditions are informed in part from the scholarly research of such theorists as Peter Harvey and Damien Keown (within the field of Buddhism), and Alastair Hannay and Jon Stewart (within the field of Kierkegaardian philosophy). My understanding of Buddhist ideas is also influenced by the writings of recognised Buddhist practitioners, many of whom practice in Asian countries such as India, Sri Lanka and Burma.

My thesis is not concerned with whether elements in Buddhist thought are superior or inferior to elements in Kierkegaardian philosophy. Similarly, my thesis does not seek to subsume one tradition into the other, by conflating them, or presenting them as completely compatible with each other. I have ensured that I have given due attention to the key differences between the two traditions, by exploring aspects of their incompatibility alongside their compatibility. In this respect, I have sought to provide a more authentic overview of the two. However, despite my best efforts to overcome my potential bias, Nathan McGovern (2017) suggests that Western scholars of Buddhism remain susceptible to charges of neo-colonialism owing to the imbalance of power that exists between the West (his work focuses on America) and Asia. Thus, he states that whilst the process of decolonization after World War Two “brought an end to the specific type of colonial empire realized by Britain and France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries”,<sup>59</sup> it has been followed by the rise of a new type of colonialism. According to McGovern, this new form of colonialism is rooted in America’s influence on the global stage, which has led to American scholarship gaining prestige across the world. As such, the American approach to

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<sup>59</sup> Nathan McGovern, ‘The Contemporary Study of Buddhism’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism*, Michael K. Jerryson (ed) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p.709



Buddhist studies has shaped how Buddhism is understood within a global context, with both academics and non-academics alike employing the works of American scholars to attempt to gain insight into the various Buddhist traditions. McGovern argues that this influence can be detrimental to Buddhist studies as American scholars are often based within the academy—within universities and other institutions of education—which means they are often concerned only with theories of the cultures they study and have had little or no first-hand experience of the application and practice of the Asian cultures they study.<sup>60</sup> This establishes limitations in their understanding. I am aware, as I have mentioned, that my work is similar to those works criticised by McGovern in so far as my research is focused on a textual analysis of the various Buddhist traditions, and of scholars' accounts of those traditions, and does not consider the practice of Buddhism in the modern world. What I do differently, however, is to examine the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhist philosophy as it is presented within the Pāli texts. Therefore, when I use the term 'Buddhism', I refer to how the term is itself employed and presented within the Pāli texts.

### Contextualising the Pāli Texts

The approach of my research differs from previous attempts to compare Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism in lieu of the fact that I have chosen to approach Buddhism through an examination of the teachings found within Pāli texts. I explained in the previous section the reasons for my approach, and how it developed in response to the limitations and problems that I had identified in previous attempts by scholar to compare ideas of Kierkegaard and Buddhism. I mentioned there the tendency for scholars to approach the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p.711.

Theravāda or Mahāyāna traditions of Buddhism as if they were schools in their own right or unitary phenomena, rather than, as I interpret them, ‘umbrella terms’, which group together a range of different Buddhist schools under the same terms. In order to avoid unhelpful generalisations such as this, and to avoid reducing or conflating the various Buddhist schools in unhelpful ways, I decided to approach my study of Buddhist thought through an examination of the Pāli texts. I chose the Pāli texts as my focus, rather than other textual traditions (such as texts from East Asia or Tibet) because I discovered in their teachings a number of intriguing parallels with Kierkegaard’s philosophy, most notably in their respective individualistic approaches to suffering and how one can achieve liberation from suffering.<sup>61</sup>

I have used the term ‘Pāli texts’ extensively throughout my thesis, rather than other expressions that I could have used, such as ‘Pāli Canon’ or ‘Pāli scriptures’.<sup>62</sup> This is because the terms ‘Pāli Canon’ and ‘Pāli scriptures’ are commonly used in a more specific or technical sense to refer to the collection of scriptures that are deemed central to the Theravāda schools of Buddhism, due to the fact that they are thought to denote the teachings of the Buddha preserved at the First Buddhist Council.<sup>6364</sup> The Pāli Canon is

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<sup>61</sup> I shall discuss the idea of both Kierkegaard and the Pāli texts proffering an individualistic approach to the liberation from suffering throughout Chapters Four and Five, however, it is worth noting here that Kierkegaard proposed a two-tiered model of liberation, with the first tier being concerned with the liberation from the sufferings that humanity cause themselves through their desires for and attachments to temporal phenomena. Kierkegaard examines how humanity can overcome this form of suffering within his 1847 publication *Opbyggelige taler i forskellig Aand* [*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*] where he suggests that one must learn to control their mind, to shift their focus away from worldly desires, a process that one can only complete for themselves. As I shall discuss in Chapter Four and Five I believe that Kierkegaard’s model possesses some similarities with the presentation of enlightenment found within the Pāli texts, for similarly these teachings suggest that one must gain mastery of the mind in order to overcome their attachments to temporal phenomena.

<sup>62</sup> This is not to say that I have not used the terms Pāli Canon or Pāli scriptures, which I have used at times throughout my work when referring to specific teachings from the Pāli Canon.

<sup>63</sup> Kevin Trainor, ‘The Three Baskets: The Tipitaka’, in *Buddhism*, Kevin Trainor (ed) (London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 2004), p.186.

<sup>64</sup> The First Buddhist Council took place soon after the death of the Buddha, dated by Charles Prebish (2008) to be around 400 BCE. The purpose of the Council was to preserve the sayings of the Buddha and the rules that

considered to be the only complete Canon of early Buddhist teachings to have survived, supposedly having been preserved in the oral tradition of the *sangha* (5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE to the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE), before their being written down during the Fourth Buddhist Council<sup>65</sup> (in the early part of the first century BCE<sup>66</sup>). The writings of the Pāli Canon (also known as the *Tiṭṭaka*) are usually grouped into three categories or ‘baskets’ as they are often called.<sup>67</sup> These are referred to as the *Vinaya Pitaka*, *Sutta Pitaka* and *Abhidhamma Pitaka*. The first of these, the *Vinaya Pitaka* are writings concerned with the monastic discipline; the second, the *Sutta Pitaka*, comprise of the discourses and sermons of the Buddha, and the third, the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, are treatises that elaborate on the teachings of the Buddha.<sup>68</sup> Whilst much of my research focuses on texts within the Pāli Canon (in particular, the *Sutta Pitaka*), I also consider Pāli literature that is outside the Pāli Canon (especially, for instance, the work of Pāli commentator Buddhaghosa).<sup>69</sup> Thus, ‘Pāli texts’ is my preferred term to use within my thesis, as I do not intend to refer simply to the Canonical texts, but to include various significant commentaries that have contributed to my interpretations of the Pāli Canon.

It is important to note here, that whilst the Pāli Canon is often associated with the Theravāda schools of Buddhism, it would be unfair to consider Theravāda Buddhism as the original or ‘orthodox’ school of Buddhism, or, indeed, for the Pāli Canon to be regarded as the original or definitive teachings of the Buddha. For, as Paul Williams and Anthony Tribe

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were to be followed by monastics. For more on this see: Bibhuti Baruah, *Buddhist Sects and Sectarianism* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2000), p.37.

<sup>65</sup> The various Buddhist traditions had begun to splinter off by the time of the Fourth Buddhist Council, which was held in Sri Lanka in the early part of the first century BC. The Council was held by the Theravāda tradition and is recognised as the Council where the Pāli texts were first codified onto palm leaves. For more on this see Weragoda Sārada Mahā Thēro, *Dharma Bhāṇaḍāgāraya: Situvan Sahita Dhammapada* (Taipei: Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1993), p.551.

<sup>66</sup> Thēro, *Dharma Bhāṇaḍāgāraya: Situvan Sahita Dhammapada*, p.551.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Baskets’ in this context refers to the baskets that the early palm-leaf manuscripts were kept in.

<sup>68</sup> For more on this see Kevein Trainor (2004).

<sup>69</sup> Buddhaghosa was a 5<sup>th</sup> Century Theravāda Buddhist whose commentaries on the Pāli Canon have according to Gombrich (2012) p.51 often been considered to provide a conventional understanding of the Pāli scriptures.

(2000) highlight, there were other schools of Buddhism in existence when the Pāli Canon was coming into being, with large sections of 'alternative Canons' existing either in their original form, or as elements subsumed within the Chinese or Tibetan Canons.<sup>70</sup> In this respect, my thesis does not, and cannot, claim to be an analysis of the original teachings of Buddhism or of 'orthodox Buddhism', for such a claim disregards the rich diversity that characterises Buddhism. My work therefore does not attempt to establish a relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Theravāda Buddhism or with early Buddhist thought, but seeks, rather, to establish key points of parallel and relationship between Kierkegaard's works and the teachings of the Pāli Canon and its various commentaries.

### Overview of Thesis

My study begins in Chapter Two (see pages 51-66) by addressing one of my key criticisms of the existing the pervious scholarship concerning the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, this is the precise meaning of the term *angest* as it appears in the writings of Kierkegaard. By establishing an appropriate definition of the term, I intend to demonstrate the problems that arise when the term is incorrectly coupled with the English term of suffering. In so doing, I explain how the term goes beyond the notion of psychological pain and torment, to denote the ontological structure of humanity that's linked to every person's capacity to harness free will. I shall therefore argue that *angest* originates in the individual's self-awareness, and capacity to recognise themselves as autonomous moral agents. After employing Kierkegaard's work, *Begrebet Angest* [*The Concept of Anxiety*] (1844) to corroborate my interpretation, I move on to distinguish

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<sup>70</sup> Williams and Tribe p.32.

between *angest* and Kierkegaard's conception of suffering. Here I refer principally to Kierkegaard's work, *Evangeliet om Lidelser* to illustrate how suffering originates in the human desire for the fleeting phenomena of the material world. I shall argue that *angest* is not synonymous with suffering in Kierkegaard's philosophy, because, for Kierkegaard, suffering originates in a person's relationship to temporal world—a relationship that can be overcome by removing one's attachment to this world. *Angest*, on the other hand, is a core component of human nature, and, as such, it is an expression of one's capacity to choose and to recognise one's responsibility for decisions and the actions that spring from these. As such, Kierkegaard maintains that *angest* cannot be overcome, and will remain as a consistent presence throughout one's lifetime.

Following my analysis of the differences between *angest* and suffering in Chapter Two, I shall move on in Chapter Three (see pages 115-119), to examine *angest* in light of the Buddhist notion of *dukkha*. It is in this chapter that I significantly advance the the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism away from its former concerns for the etymological meanings of essential terms, or 'word association' as I have called it, to an original analysis that recognises the philosophical complexities of *dukkha* and *angest*. I therefore begin Chapter Three by exploring the three distinct forms of *dukkha* found within the Pāli texts and will conclude that it is the final form of *dukkha*—*saṅkhārā-dukkha*<sup>71</sup>—that has most in common with Kierkegaard's *angest* (see pages 95-119). My original interpretation of the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism in this chapter is grounded in the idea that both *angest* and *saṅkhārā-dukkha* are concerned

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<sup>71</sup> I shall provide a detailed definition of *saṅkhārā-dukkha* in chapter three (see page 99-115). However, it is worth noting here that *saṅkhārā-dukkha* is defined by Bhikkhu Bodhi as the ""a basic unsatisfactoriness pervading all existence, all forms of life, because all forms of life are changing, impermanent and without any inner core or substance." For more on this see Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010).

with the individual's sense of 'I' and 'mine'—so much so, that, in both cases, the individual values their sense of self to the extent that they fall victim to a kind of egotism that inevitably leads to feelings of anxiety and *angest* with regards to the status of their future self. In this chapter, I draw on the Buddhist notion of *uddhacca-kukkucca*, which is often associated with the anxiety in relation to the future—an anxiety that expresses itself through feelings of concern and apprehension (see pages 134-137). I will end this chapter by broadening my argument, and demonstrating its wider applicability by considering, by way of example, the Buddha's rejection of all forms of predetermination—a belief in unfettered freedom that can give rise to anxiety when faced with the prospect of *kamma* (of one's actions influencing one's future rebirth). Here, I shall demonstrate that the role of *kamma* in Buddhist anxiety is akin to the role of God in Kierkegaardian *angest*: both are forces that heighten a person's moral responsibility, which, in turn, makes them more susceptible to greater anxiety (see pages 142 - 158). My innovative redevelopment of the relationship between *angest* and *dukkha* reveals valuable insights into the similar roles and impacts given to human freedom and responsibility in Kierkegaardian philosophy and the teachings of the Pāli texts.

In Chapter Four I examine the relationship between Kierkegaard's view of suffering and the Second and Third Noble Truths, and I advance an original argument that reveals striking resemblances between the origins of suffering and the liberation from it in the ideas of Kierkegaard and Buddhism. I begin this chapter with an examination of the Buddhist notion of *taṇhā*, and its relationship to *samudaya* (The Second Noble Truth). Here I refer to the three distinct forms of *taṇhā*, namely *kāma-taṇhā* (desire for sense pleasures), *bhava-taṇhā* (desire for existence), and *vibhava-taṇhā* (desire for non-existence). I explain how each distinct form of desire is reflected in the works of Kierkegaard: I explain how *kāma-taṇhā* is

linked to Kierkegaard's understanding of human suffering (see pages 117-198); how *bhava-taṇhā* links with his ethical mode of existence (see pages 161-180); and *vibhava-taṇhā* with Kierkegaard's aesthetic mode of existence (see pages 198 - 202). By exposing the semblances between the forms of *taṇhā* and this broad range of philosophical ideas within Kierkegaard's philosophy, I will have consolidated a new and innovative approach to the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism. In other words, I will have demonstrated how desire is regarded in both systems of thought as an obstacle that prevents people from recognising the true nature of reality, and, moreover, one that prevents them from attaining liberation from their suffering.

I continue Chapter Four by introducing the second of my original approaches to the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, this time by addressing how, despite the significant differences between Kierkegaard's notion of the 'final' salvation and the Buddhist concept of *an-up ādisesa-nibbāna* (*nibbāna* without remainder), there remains a striking similarity between Kierkegaard's conception of humanities 'initial' liberation from suffering and the Buddhist concept of *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna* (*nibbāna* with remainder). The correspondence between Kierkegaard's initial liberation and *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna* is engrained in both systems of thought, with their respective beliefs that a person can liberate themselves from suffering by overcoming their worldly desires and recognising the true nature of the cosmos as temporal and fleeting. Throughout Chapter Four I make two innovative connections between Buddhism and Kierkegaard's philosophy: namely, the connection between *samudaya* and Kierkegaard's conception of suffering (see pages 161-180), and between enlightenment and Kierkegaard's initial form of liberation (see pages 219-240). These connections have been overlooked in all previous works on the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism. In this chapter, I utilise these two points

of connection to underscore the common philosophies found within Kierkegaard's writings and the teachings of the Pāli texts, with their common belief that, on the one hand, desire is an obstruction to one's capacity to gauge the true nature of reality, and, on the other hand, that one must have the capacity to overcome their desires and find lasting satisfaction through the strengthening and resolution of their minds.

In my final chapter—Chapter Five—I develop my argument about the liberation from suffering, by examining the roles of Christ and the Buddha in guiding their respective followers on the path to liberation. Here I focus on Kierkegaard's portrayal of Christ's humanity, and his suggesting that it was through his incarnation that Christ chose to strip himself of divine perfections, to allow him to suffer with humanity (see pages 273-290). By presenting Christ in this way, I contend that Kierkegaard understands Christ in a similar manner to the presentation of the Buddha in the Pāli texts. I explain how both Kierkegaard and the Pāli texts portray their respective figurehead as one who suffers from human desires, as one who experiences the dissatisfactions that characterise human life. By presenting Christ in this way, Kierkegaard advocates that he, too, had to liberate himself from his human sufferings: that he had to overcome his desires to return to his former divinity (see pages 285-291). I therefore reveal that both Pāli texts and Kierkegaard's philosophy uphold their figurehead as the one who can teach his followers the path to overcoming their desire and thus become liberated from suffering.

Overall, my original contribution to the academic field is in my enrichment of the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism. I expose several new and valuable areas of affinity between the two systems of thought, regarding their approaches to human nature, the origins of suffering, and the nature of liberation.



## Chapter Two: The Difference Between Angest and Suffering Within Kierkegaard's Narrative

Academic comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism have consistently suffered due to the failure of commentators to recognise that there is a distinction between Kierkegaard's works concerning the nature of *angest* and suffering. Many scholars<sup>72</sup> have approached this topic under the illusion that Kierkegaard's chief work in this area is *Begrebet Angest* [*The Concept of Anxiety*] (1844), believing that this text is Kierkegaard's most extensive work concerning anguish and turmoil that characterises the human condition. The primary reason for commentators' interest and preoccupation with this text is owing to the fact that it is one of the central works in Kierkegaard's existential writings that explores how his conception of *angest* (often translated as anxiety or dread) relates to human freedom and living an authentic life. However, the attention given to this specific work has led to major misgivings concerning Kierkegaard's perception of suffering, with distinguished commentators such as Clare Carlisle and Timothy Dalrymple often using the term 'suffering' as a synonym for *angest*, creating the impression that Kierkegaard viewed these two terms as equivalent.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Scholars who have made this mistake include Clare Carlisle (2006), Timothy Dalrymple (2010), Jon Stewart (2009), Gordon Marino (2008), Simon D. Podmore (2011) and James B. McCarthy (1980).

<sup>73</sup> It should be noted here, that this is not a problem restricted to the works of comparative philosophers or scholars of comparative religion, who have approached Kierkegaard as a non-specialist in order to establish parallels between Kierkegaard's work and one of their areas of expertise. In fact, the use of the term suffering as a synonym or extension for the term *angest* is also evident in the work of prominent Kierkegaardian scholars such as Clare Carlisle: see Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2006); and Timothy Dalrymple: see Timothy Dalrymple, *Abraham: Fear and Trembling* (2010).

Unfortunately, this has resulted in scholars (such as Winston King, 2013;<sup>74</sup> Sundar Ramaswami and Anees A. Sheikh, 1996;<sup>75</sup> and Lynn De Silva, 1980<sup>76</sup>) seeking to explore the relationship between the Buddhist concept of *dukkha* and the works of Kierkegaard by exclusively focusing on their comparison on the notion of *angest*. This approach has meant that commentators, Winston King and Lynn De Silva, who have explored the relationship between Buddhism and Kierkegaard have done so, solely in terms that take into account Kierkegaard's existential musings, often completely failing to discuss other relevant aspects of his works, such as the impact that Christianity has had on it. Through ignoring the more 'theological' writings of Kierkegaard, King and De Silva have, arguably, committed a great disservice to the field of comparative philosophy, for, as I will argue, had they recognised Christian themes in their considerations, they would also recognise the crucial fact that Kierkegaard himself viewed suffering as distinct from *angest*. Indeed, Kierkegaard recognised that both suffering and *angest* express themselves differently, and are experienced differently throughout a person's life, and, moreover, may impact a person's approach to life in dramatically different ways. Kierkegaard composed two extensive essays on the value of suffering (along with several shorter works), as part of his 'discourse literature'.

Kierkegaard's writings on suffering reveal that Kierkegaard viewed suffering as a vital aspect of a person's journey towards "authentic individuality", as it has a liberating effect that can enable a person to recognise the limits of the temporal world and strive to go beyond it. In

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<sup>74</sup> Winston L. King, *Buddhism and Christianity: Some Bridges of Understanding* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p.109.

<sup>75</sup> Sundar Ramaswami & Anees A. Sheikh, 'Buddhist Psychology: Implications for Healing', in *Healing East and West: Ancient Wisdom and Modern Psychology*, Anees A. Sheikh & Katharina S. Sheikh (eds) (Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1996), p.118.

<sup>76</sup> De Silva, 'Christian Reflection in a Buddhist Context', pp.97-98.

this way Kierkegaard approaches suffering in a radically different manner to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. In other words, while the Church regarded human suffering as the divine retribution for the original sin of Adam,<sup>77</sup> Kierkegaard, by contrast, associated the cause of human suffering with the human preoccupation with a materialistic approach to life, and desire for temporal pleasures. Kierkegaard's ideas therefore present clear comparisons with central Buddhist doctrines, such as *dukkha* and *anicca* (impermanence), and, consequently, provide us with the opportunity to explore Buddhism not only in line with Kierkegaard's approach to existentialism, but also his theological ideas.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how Buddhist philosophy relates to both *angest* and suffering exclusively, recognising that these two concepts were treated as distinct by Kierkegaard, and that in this way they should be approached separately. By approaching the work of Kierkegaard in this manner, I intend to challenge the existing academic literature concerning the relationship between his work and Buddhist philosophy, and to critique scholars for their mistaken emphasis on *angest*, as too narrow an approach when comparing Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism. For scholars, such as Torkel Brekke (1999)<sup>78</sup>, Sundar Ramaswami and Anees A. Sheikh<sup>79</sup> and Gerald Anderson (1976)<sup>80</sup> have often explored *dukkha* exclusively in terms of existential anguish, thereby suggesting that both concepts are vital sources of motivation on one's path to self-overcoming. However, in approaching the relationship between Kierkegaard and Buddhism in this way, the aforementioned scholars could be accused of manipulating certain aspects of either

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<sup>77</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, Volume 1: Journals AA-DD*, Bruce H. Kirmmse, Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, George Pattison, Jon Stewart, Vanessa Rumble, David Kangas & Brian Söderquist (eds) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p.470.

<sup>78</sup> Torkel Brekke, 'The Role of Fear in Indian Religious Thought with Special Reference to Buddhism', in *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 27, no. 5 (October 1999), p.451.

<sup>79</sup> Ramaswami & Sheikh, 'Buddhist Psychology: Implications for Healing', p.118.

<sup>80</sup> Gerald Anderson, *Asian Voices in Christian Theology* (Ossining: Orbis Books, 1976), p.41.

Buddhist or Kierkegaardian philosophy in order to suggest stronger parallels between them that are not as strong as they suggest. With Torkel Brekke, for example, forcing inappropriate links between Kierkegaard and Buddhism by suggesting that Buddhist doctrines, such as *dukkha*, denote fear<sup>81</sup>, whilst Sundar Ramaswami, Anees Sheikh and Gerald Anderson all define *dukkha* exclusively in terms of existential anxiety. Therefore, I aim to examine the relationship between *dukkha* and *angest* in a more appropriate, accurate, and thorough a manner, and, furthermore, I shall consider how Kierkegaard's work concerning the nature and impact of suffering—as found in what is referred to as his 'discourse literature'—can be seen to reflect the central teachings of the Pāli Canon. Here I focus specifically on the philosophy of the Four Noble Truths, and the significance of the figurehead of the Buddha. By approaching my research in this way, I intend to emphasise that there *are* strong parallels between the teachings of Buddhism and Kierkegaardian philosophy, but these parallels are different in emphasis than those currently presented in academic scholarship, with the relationship between *angest* and *dukkha* being just *one* aspect of the comparison, and not the *only* one. Furthermore, as I shall show, there are more formidable points of comparison between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhist ideas within Kierkegaard's 'discourse literature'. In particular, I will contend that significant parallels exist between Kierkegaard's conception of suffering, as found in *Evangeliet om Lidelser* [The Gospel of Sufferings] and Buddhist notion of *dukkha* (as presented in the Pāli Canon), demonstrating how both philosophies hold that suffering is a product of one's attachments to temporal phenomena, and that one is able to liberate themselves from suffering by overcoming their attachments (for more on this see pages 219-240).

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<sup>81</sup> Brekke, 'The Role of Fear in Indian Religious Thought with Special Reference to Buddhism', p.451.

## The Meaning of Angest

When pursuing a detailed understanding of the relationship between Buddhism and the work of Kierkegaard, it is vital to first discuss how Kierkegaard's concepts of *angest* and suffering differ from one another. For despite Kierkegaard presenting these concepts as distinctive but interrelated, commentators of his work often overlook Kierkegaard's discussions about the nature of suffering, choosing instead to focus entirely on his discussions on *angest* as if this were the only concept in his work that is comparable with the teachings of Buddhism. As such, it is imperative to establish how these two concepts differ from one another, so that I can explore and explain how each has an important and unique relationship to Buddhism. To this end I shall examine the significance of both *angest* and suffering, not only in the existential context of Kierkegaard's work, but also in his more theological writings. I shall explore how these different contexts of Kierkegaard's work seek to make sense of human nature in terms of a person's self-understanding, and their approach to the external world, and to the world of the infinite.<sup>82</sup> By doing this I intend to make it clear how these concepts differ from one another and thus how scholars have been mistaken in failing to examine Buddhism in light of both of these topics, as opposed to just *angest*.

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<sup>82</sup> Whether that be the theological context of the infinite nature of God, or the existential notion of transcendence with its connotations of inescapable freedom and becoming.

I shall begin this examination by exploring the central themes present in Kierkegaard's 1844 *Begrebet Angest*, one of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous texts<sup>83</sup> attributed to his pseudonymous author, *Vigilius Haufniensis* (also known as the 'Watchman of Copenhagen'<sup>84</sup>). In order to comprehend the relationship between *angest* and suffering in Kierkegaard's writings, one would do well to examine how the term *angest* has been interpreted and understood by Kierkegaard's commentators and translators. This is particularly significant due to the fact that the term *angest* has been a point of controversy amongst English speaking Kierkegaardian scholars, throughout the twentieth century and in recent decades, with much debate about its most suitable translation, with meanings as diverse as anxiety, fear, dread or agony being suggested. While these meanings may, at a glance, seem similar, when scrutinised, it becomes clear that there are subtle—but fundamental—differences between them, and, moreover, these differences have huge implications on our understanding of Kierkegaard's use of the term *angest*, often dramatically changing its philosophical, existential, and theological meaning. As such, it is imperative that, when examining Kierkegaard's notion of *angest*, scholars are aware of the complex range of emotions that Kierkegaard intends in his use of the term. In particular, it is imperative to explore how *angest* is linked to the English terms "dread" and "anxiety"

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<sup>83</sup> It should be noted here that Kierkegaard attempts to distance himself from a number of his works by employing a range of devices that serve to problematize the authoritative voice of the author for the reader. This is most apparent in his more existential writings. By doing this, Kierkegaard sought to present various viewpoints and perspectives on the same topics and empower the reader to decide for which was most compelling. To this end, Kierkegaard often employed different pseudonyms for his works. These different characters represented different perspectives, and he presented these characters in dialogue with each other. These dialogues represent philosophical critiques of the various perspectives, which give rise to interesting insights into them. For more on this see Richard McCombs (2013).

<sup>84</sup> In relating his pseudonymous author with the concept of a 'watchman' Kierkegaard scholar Josiah Thompson, infers that Kierkegaard is attempting to suggest that his pseudonym has drawn his conclusions from "watching" or "observing" the people of Copenhagen. In this way, it would seem Kierkegaard is implying that his conclusions are not only drawn through philosophical speculation, but from his observations of the people around him. There Thompson implies that Kierkegaard attempts to establish an empirical aspect to this work, maintaining that his findings are evident in human behaviour. For more on this see Robert L. Perkins (2006).

(which are often employed in English translations of Kierkegaard's *angest*), as these distinctive terms will impact on our understanding and approach to Kierkegaard's philosophy.

In the earliest translations of Kierkegaard's works published in 1924, Walter Lowrie translates the term *angest* as "dread" such that *angest* implies, for Lowrie and his readers, 'a great apprehension or fear'.<sup>85</sup> However, sixteen years later, in his 1940 translation of Kierkegaard's *Stadier på Livets Vej* [*Stages on Life's Way*] (1845), he changes his approach to *angest*, now employing no less than five different translations of the word, including "dread",<sup>86</sup> "anxiety",<sup>87</sup> "anguish",<sup>88</sup> "foreboding",<sup>89</sup> and "agony".<sup>90</sup> The fact that one author employs a variety of words—and implied meanings—in substitute for *angest* illustrates clearly the difficulties English translators have had in arriving at a definitive translation of this term.

Nonetheless, in the introduction to his 1943 translation of Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angest*, Lowrie maintained that there had been a general agreement among English translators that the appropriate translation of *angest* is "dread".<sup>91</sup> Lowrie explains that this decision was rooted in the rejection of the work of French translators, who had employed the word *angoisse* (corresponding to the English term, "anguish"), in their definition of *angest*. Lowrie asserts that *angoisse* failed to capture the complex emotional turmoil that Kierkegaard

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<sup>85</sup> Gregory R. Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses: Kierkegaard on Anxiety and Despair* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1996), p.15.

<sup>86</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, Walter Lowrie (trans) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), p.109.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p.203.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p.228.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p.240.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p.289.

<sup>91</sup> Walter Lowrie, *The Concept of Dread*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), p.x.

expresses in his use of *angest*.<sup>92</sup> Consequently, “after a desperate search for something better”,<sup>93</sup> Lowrie, and his colleagues, decided on “dread” as the closest translation.

By contrast, within his work *Freedom and Its Misuses: Kierkegaard on Anxiety and Despair* (1996), Gregory Beabout proposes that dread is an ill-chosen translation of the Danish *angest*, as this English term infers a ‘fear of something’.<sup>94</sup> In this way, he implies that dread cannot express the complex range of emotions that Kierkegaard alludes to through *angest*, for he contends that within Kierkegaard’s writings (in particular, *Begrebet Angest*) *angest* is utilised to denote more than fear of a particular experience or object: it is, he says, ‘both an attraction to and a repulsion from the nothingness of future possibilities’.<sup>95</sup> He claims, therefore, that the term anxiety is a more accurate translation, as this term captures the feelings of apprehension and psychological torment, which is so integral to Kierkegaard’s work.

Interestingly, Beabout recognises that anxiety is an imperfect translation for *angest*, by highlighting the fact that there are several other Danish words that are closer in meaning to ‘anxiety’ than *angest*.<sup>96</sup> Specifically, Beabout cites the Danish terms *becoming* (excessive worry about something that is not in one’s control), *plage* (to be tormented), and *selvplagelsens* (self-torment) as more exact translations of anxiety.<sup>97</sup> While this could be regarded as a strong argument for rejecting ‘anxiety’ as the English translation of *angest*, it is vital to remember that Kierkegaard employed the term *angest* to explore existential ideas

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses*, p.15.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid, p.18.

<sup>96</sup> Equally, in a similar fashion to Beabout’s suggestions, it should be noted that online translation software, also recognises a wide range of terms as possible translations for the English anxiety, offering *angest* as one of several possible translations.

<sup>97</sup> Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses*, p.18.



that were not widely recognised within academia at that time.<sup>98</sup> As such, it could be argued that when translating *angest* within the context of Kierkegaardian philosophy, one must not focus on the term's historical usage, but its role and significance within Kierkegaard's existential approach to the word.<sup>99</sup> In this way, it would be fairly straightforward to recognise and identify in Kierkegaard's discussions on the nature of *angest* something—in the words of scholar John Tanner (1992)—'akin to a conjunction of fear and fascination, repulsion and attraction'.<sup>100101</sup> It would seem that the closest translation to this mixture of emotions is anxiety, as this term is traditionally understood as something that extends beyond "fear"; it is 'worry over the future or about something with an uncertain outcome; uneasy concern about a person, situation, etc.; a troubled state of mind arising from such worry or concern'.<sup>102</sup> In this respect, Backhouse suggests that anxiety is similar to Kierkegaard's *angst*; they both denote feelings of a distinctly human nature: feelings of panic or apprehension about an uncertain future and the ability to freely choose how to act and to direct one's life amidst this uncertainty. For both terms represent feelings of foreboding that are not rooted in fear of an experience or object but are the result of one's fear of

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<sup>98</sup> The existential undertones of Kierkegaard's *angest* has clear comparisons to Sartre's use of the terms anxiety and angst within his works. With both Sartre and Heidegger acknowledging Kierkegaard's conception of *angest* as inspiring aspects of their existential philosophy. This in turn as led to many expecting anxiety as being an equivalent term to Kierkegaard's *angest*. For more on this see Susan Iacovou & Karen Weixel-Dixon (2015).

<sup>99</sup> John S. Tanner, *Anxiety in Eden: A Kierkegaardian Reading of Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.30.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Whilst there exists no one English word that is commonly used to convey this curious mixture of emotions, we can find suitable terms in more obscure philosophical and religious works. See for instance, the term 'numinous', which is developed by Rudolf Otto, scholar of religious studies, to denote the essence of all religious experience. Otto refers to the numinous as 'the *mysterium tremendum*': an experience that both fascinates and repels. It comprises several different aspects—perhaps most relevant here, is the aspect of 'dread'. Rudolf Otto (1958). Another word that finds parallel to this mix of emotions is the 'sublime'. This is a term used in philosophical theories of aesthetic experience to denote the fascinating and repelling nature of an object that is both awesome and terrifying. For more on this see Immanuel Kant (2012).

<sup>102</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, *Anxiety*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/8968?redirectedFrom=anxiety#eid>, 5 January 2017.

uncertainty and responsibility. As the scholar Charles Bellinger (2001) suggests, both *angest* and anxiety arise from feelings of ambivalence.<sup>103</sup> Throughout Chapter Three I will demonstrate how the complex emotional turmoil that is signified by the term *angest* is a vital link between this term and Buddhist concepts—notably *uddhacca-kukkucca*: a term used to denote a sense of restlessness and worry (see pages 134-137). It is very important, I wish to claim, to be aware of the complexity of the meaning of *angest*, if one is to assess the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism properly and thoroughly.

Despite the continued debate among scholars and translators throughout the last century, it is evident that anxiety has become more closely linked to Kierkegaard's concept of *angest*. This is made especially clear when one examines the works of distinguished Kierkegaardian translators, such as Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson (1980)<sup>104</sup>, Robert Perkins (1985),<sup>105</sup> and Alastair Hannay (2014),<sup>106</sup> for each has selected the term anxiety over dread, in recognition of the fact that the intense emotional ambiguity associated with *angest* is more clearly reflected within the associations conveyed by the English term anxiety.<sup>107</sup> In this fashion, celebrated Kierkegaardian translators Alastair Hannay, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong are now using the term 'anxiety' exclusively in their interpretations of *angest*. In so doing, these writers inevitably emphasise its nature as one of "unfocused" fear, which is to say, a fear that is not rooted in our human response to a *specific object* or phenomena

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<sup>103</sup> Charles K. Bellinger, *The Genealogy of Violence: Reflections on Creation, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.84.

<sup>104</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, Reidar Thomte (ed & trans) Albert B. Anderson (Introduction) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

<sup>105</sup> Robert L. Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary [vol.8]: The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issues of Hereditary Sin*, Robert L. Perkins (ed) (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985).

<sup>106</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, Alastair Hannay (ed & trans) (New York: Liveright, 2014).

<sup>107</sup> Gregory R. Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses*, p17.

within the temporal world, but, rather, an agitated feeling in response to an *unknown future*. Both Hannay and the Hongs have linked both *angest* and anxiety to an apprehension of the future that is grounded in a person's inability to accept the responsibility of their own freedom. It is my intention, therefore, to employ the connotations of 'anxiety' throughout my thesis when discussing Kierkegaard's *angest*, as my evaluation of this term<sup>108</sup> indicates that it is the most adequate one to express the fundamental, existential meanings intended and implied by Kierkegaard's writings about *angest*.

As I have mentioned, a detailed explanation or definition of *angest* allows us to appreciate the extent to which this term has been misrepresented by scholars (such as Winston King and Lynn De Silva), who have explored the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism. I have noted that *angest* is employed by Kierkegaard to denote distinct feelings of apprehension or anguish regarding the uncertainties of one's future. I shall revisit this definition in more detail throughout this chapter, but for now, I wish simply to highlight that the term *angest* differs greatly from the English notion of suffering (and, moreover, the Buddhist notion of *dukkha*), for 'suffering' is a broad term that signifies a range of physical and psychological pains and distresses. The term *angest* refers explicitly to Kierkegaard's understanding of freedom and its relationship to moral accountability. The relationship between freedom and *angest* will become apparent in the next section of this chapter, where Kierkegaard's concept of freedom and its relationship with Christian spirituality and existential philosophy will also become apparent. We shall see that *angest*, at its most basic level, is an awareness of one's freedom to make decisions, whilst also being held accountable before God. Kierkegaard's existentialism must, therefore, be recognised as going

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<sup>108</sup> In light of its use and justification within the key works of Beabout (2002), Perkins (1985), Thomte (1980), Hannay (2014) and Howard and Edith Hong (1978).

hand in hand with his Christian faith, for his understanding of freedom stems from the human capacity to defy God. By establishing a clear definition of Kierkegaard's *angest* I intend to demonstrate how the works of Winston King and Lynn De Silva have forced and forged parallels between *dukkha* and *angest* that fail to recognise the complexity of one or both of these central concepts.

### The Concept of Angest in Kierkegaard's Literature

Kierkegaard, through his pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis<sup>109</sup>, commences his examination of the nature of *angest* by asserting his intention to approach the subject psychologically, in order to develop a cognitive understanding of the relationship between *angest* and ontological conditions of human nature. In so doing, it becomes clear that, for Haufniensis, *angest* is more than an emotional state that may affect a person now and then; it is an essential component of a person's ontological structure.<sup>110</sup> *Angest* is a fundamental existential condition for human being. Haufniensis maintains that an understanding of *angest* is vital for our comprehension of what it means to be human, and he claims that it is ultimately through *angest* that each of us can come to realise our essential freedom and

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<sup>109</sup> It should be noted here that whenever I examine a pseudonymous text, I shall credit the work to Kierkegaard's chosen author. I have chosen to approach Kierkegaard in this way due to the existing precedent set by Kierkegaardian scholars such as Clare Carlisle and Jon Stewart, both of whom have stated that scholars are obligated to approach each pseudonym as distinct from one another and moreover Kierkegaard himself. In particular, Carlisle highlights that each pseudonym possesses a distinct personality and theological standpoint and to ignore this would be to misrepresent Kierkegaard's contributions to both theology and philosophy. For more information see Clare Carlisle (2006).

<sup>110</sup> John R. Cihak, *Balthasar and Anxiety* (London: T and T Clark, 2009), pp.67-83.

begin to shape our individual identity.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, Haufniensis contends that an examination of *angest* will lead us to important theological conclusions about the human condition, and its relationship to sin. That is to say, for Haufniensis, an understanding of the human existential condition involves consideration of both our psychological and theological makeup. He insists, for instance, that “psychology thus delves into the possibility of sin”,<sup>112</sup> meaning that if one is to truly comprehend how humans come to sin, they must first understand the psychological states that give rise to sin as a possibility. Haufniensis’ psychological approach in *Begrebet Angest*, however, somewhat complicates this aspiration. For Haufniensis asserts that, ultimately, the psychological method he intends to employ in his examination of *angest* is not appropriate for his consideration of sin, for, he claims, “the concept of sin does not properly belong to any science”.<sup>113</sup> In other words, sin, for Haufniensis, ought to be recognised as a theological concept, as dogma, and, as such, must be understood in light of divine revelation, and not in terms of human psychology. He claims that by examining sin in light of human experience, one ultimately misjudges the concept, stripping it of its theological overtones and failing to engage its true significance.<sup>114</sup> This is made evident when Haufniensis states: “Sin, however, is no matter for psychological concern... Treating it in another place, through framing it in a nonessential refraction in reflection, is to corrupt it”.<sup>115</sup> Thus, it is clear that Haufniensis maintains that sin cannot be understood in psychological terms, and should only be approached through religious dogma. Due to his insistence that sin is the “subject of sermon”<sup>116</sup> and not human science or

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<sup>111</sup> Gregory Beabout, ‘Drawing Out the Relationship Between Anxiety and Despair in Kierkegaard’s Writings’, in *Søren Kierkegaard: Epistemology and Psychology: Kierkegaard and the Recoil From Freedom*, Daniel W. Conway & K. E. Gover (eds) (London: Routledge, 2002), p.35.

<sup>112</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.29.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p.27.

<sup>114</sup> Med Ib Ostenfeld, *Søren Kierkegaard’s Psychology*, (Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1978), p.63.

<sup>115</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.19.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, p.21.

psychology, Haufniensis fails to provide a clear and precise explanation of his understanding of sin, often making it difficult for the reader to gauge his unique standpoint on this issue. Accordingly, the purpose of *Begrebet Angest* is most appropriately understood as a psychological explanation of the relationship between *angest* and freedom, and an attempt to explore the psychological condition of humanity before the fall—that is to say, before humanity commits acts of sin. In *Begrebet Angest*, Kierkegaard—through Haufniensis—seeks to explain the psychological impetus for sinful actions, rather than the theological effects of these actions. In this respect, we can already start to see that the term *angest* is markedly different to those experiences ordinarily implied by the term ‘suffering’; it has ontological and metaphysical ramifications that pertain to human self-awareness and human freedom. Furthermore, any suggestion that *angest* and *dukkha* denote human suffering is misguided.

Haufniensis instigates his examination and exploration of the traditional teachings surrounding original sin, and by questioning the impact these teachings have had on contemporaneous understandings of human nature. In so doing, he suggests that the doctrine of original sin has deceived people into overlooking the significance of their individualism, and into rejecting their moral responsibility. As such he rejects traditional theological interpretations of the account of Genesis 3 using two distinct arguments, as follows. Firstly, Haufniensis denies the conventional Catholic and Lutheran readings of Genesis 3 in his assertion that this Biblical chapter suggests that Adam—the first man—is independent of human history. This unconventional reading is problematic in theological terms; as Kierkegaardian scholar, Alastair Hannay puts it: “the problem is always to have Adam included in the race, and in the same sense in which every other individual is included. This is something dogmatics should attend to, especially for the sake of the

Atonement”.<sup>117</sup> From his assertion, it is clear that Haufniensis refutes the Catholic and Lutheran beliefs that, in his pre-fallen state, Adam is essentially different in nature to humanity after the fall. Indeed, Haufniensis continues to assert that “the history of the human race got a fanciful start, Adam was placed fancifully outside, pious feeling and fantasy got what they wanted, a godly prelude, but thinking got nothing”.<sup>118</sup> Haufniensis is clearly challenging orthodox Catholic doctrine with his contention that Adam, throughout the Genesis narrative, shifts from a state of ‘original justice’ (characterised by his innocence and integrity), to the postlapsarian state tainted by lust.<sup>119</sup> For he claims that the Catholic and Lutheran Churches, by setting Adam apart from humanity—in presenting him as something ‘beyond humanity’—has removed him from the narrative of human history, thereby placing him outside of the human race.<sup>120</sup> For Haufniensis, this notion is unfeasible because, as he puts it, “Christ alone is an individual who is more than an individual”.<sup>121</sup> In other words, to suggest that Adam was beyond human limitations elevates him to a transcendent level that is comparable to Christ—a proposition that challenges the very foundations of Christianity. Haufniensis rejects the concept of inherited sin on similar grounds, suggesting that, by recognising humans are tainted by inherited sin, Adam sets himself apart from the rest of humankind. In so doing, orthodox approaches to original sin have suggested that Adam’s sin is fundamentally different from the sins committed by the rest of humanity, for, as Haufniensis notes of Adam’s sin: it “becomes more than the past. Hereditary sin is here and now, it is sinfulness, and Adam is the only one in whom it was

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<sup>117</sup> Alastair Hannay, *The Concept of Anxiety*, (New York: Liveright, 2014), p.41.

<sup>118</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.31.

<sup>119</sup> Cihak, *Balthasar and Anxiety*, pp.67-83.

<sup>120</sup> Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses*, P39.

<sup>121</sup> Hannay, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.21.

not".<sup>122</sup> It is Haufniensis' contention, therefore, that the concept of inherited sin allows the Church to maintain the belief that humans have a compulsion to sin; and, furthermore, that lust has become part of human nature to the extent that humans can no longer control their desires. However, given that Haufniensis maintains that Adam was not tainted by original sin, his sin is unique to him, for it is committed not because of his fallen nature, but from his own volition. Thus, according to Haufniensis, Adam, as the original man, must be treated as part of creation, or risk being understood as theologically superior to humanity. He subsequently maintains that the notion of inherited sin must be rejected, and the idea that all of humanity is responsible for its individual sinful actions must be embraced.<sup>123</sup>

Haufniensis' preoccupation with Biblical interpretation at the start of *Begrebet Angest* may give the impression to his readers that its shifting away from its intended psychological study of human nature into the realm of theological dogma; however, it is important to note that in his refutation of these orthodox ideas, Haufniensis has sought to challenge the notion that human nature has an existential predisposition to sin. Indeed, and in light of this perspective, the Kierkegaardian scholar Edward Harris concludes that the opening chapters of *Begrebet Angest* should be regarded as a psychological rejection of orthodox interpretations of original sin—a psychological approach that is grounded in the idea that all humans must be understood as similar in nature, possessing the same capacity to freely *choose sin*, as Adam had before.<sup>124</sup> It is made clear that the fundamental character of human nature, according to Haufniensis, is *freedom*. For Haufniensis, humans are not

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<sup>122</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.32.

<sup>123</sup> George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century: The Paradox and the 'Point of Contact'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.144.

<sup>124</sup> Edward Harris, *Man's Ontological Predicament: A Detailed Analysis of Kierkegaard's Concept of Sin with Special Reference to the Concept of Dread* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1984), p.122.



compelled blindly to give in to their lustful desires, but, rather, have the capacity to shape their own futures by harnessing their freedom.

In his refutation and rejection of the doctrines traditionally associated with Genesis 3, Haufniensis attempts to establish a wholly new understanding of the Biblical Adam. In Haufniensis' reading, Adam is no longer the father of those who inherit sin but is now regarded as the prototypal sinner. As Haufniensis states: "Each [person] loses innocence in essentially the same way that Adam lost it",<sup>125</sup> thereby alluding to the idea that Adam's first sin is comparable to the sin of every person who has ever transgressed. Thus, the Biblical narrative found in Genesis 3 is transformed by Haufniensis into something akin to cautionary tale that illustrates one man's fall from virtue to sin<sup>126</sup>—a tale that foreshadows the fall which each individual inflicts upon themselves if they give in to temptation and reject God's holy law. Through his interpretation, Haufniensis advocates that humanity is not connected to Adam by a biologically inherited sin, but, rather, by the human capacity to conform to the word of God. In this way, Adam's actions can be seen as foretelling the weakness of human nature, and the ease by which humans are tempted by their desires.<sup>127</sup> This is evident from the following proclamation by Haufniensis:

That sin came into the world is quite true, but that is no concern of Adam's. To put it quite pointedly and accurately one must say: through the first sin, sinfulness entered Adam. It would not occur to us to say about any later person that it was through his sin that sinfulness came into the world; yet it enters the world through

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<sup>125</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.44.

<sup>126</sup> I have used the term 'man' here as Haufniensis explores the Biblical account of Genesis three almost exclusively with reference to Adam.

<sup>127</sup> Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses*, p.42.

him in a similar way, because, put pointedly and accurately, sinfulness is in the world only insofar as it enters through sin.<sup>128</sup>

From this it is clear that, for Haufniensis, sin becomes something that each individual is responsible for; human free will is not tainted by the transgressions of Adam but is something that can be enlisted by any given person, providing them with moral agency and responsibility. George Pattison (2003) suggests that it is this ethical underpinning that makes *Begrebet Angest* such a vital part of the Kierkegaardian Canon; he states: “the conclusion, therefore is that while anxiety defines the pace that the human being leaps into sin, it is also from that same place that the human being can leap towards good”.<sup>129</sup>

According to Haufniensis, the fact that humans are able to recognise they are free to choose either to follow or to transgress the will of God implies that the hallmark of human nature is its capacity for freedom, rather than its disposition towards lust.<sup>130</sup>

It is worth noting here, that despite the fact that it is couched in Biblical allusion, Haufniensis’ point that people need to recognise themselves as moral, autonomous agent resonates with aspects of Buddhism. As I shall argue, freedom and responsibility are important concepts found within the Pāli Canon (see pages 142-158).

A consequence of Haufniensis’ account is that sin should be recognised ultimately as a state that moves from one of innocence to one of guilt—a movement that causes a person to feel remorse. Haufniensis likens this original state of innocence to a state of ignorance, declaring that “innocence is ignorance. It is by no means the pure being of the immediate but is

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p.40.

<sup>129</sup> Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, p.133.

<sup>130</sup> In so doing, Haufniensis challenges the Augustinian notion that humanity post-fall is compelled to sin, in his assertion that, through anxiety, humans are made aware of their capacity for choice.

ignorance. That ignorance when viewed from outside is seen in terms of knowledge is something that concerns ignorance not at all”.<sup>131</sup> Here, Haufiennis suggests that Adam, like all subsequent humans, fails to recognise the significance of their “original sin”, for he and they do not comprehend the fact that it is through sin that one’s focus falls upon the material world rather than the its spiritual counterpart: that, through sin, a person becomes consumed by guilt, and this will cause a drastic change in their relationship with both the world and God. In support of this crucial idea, Simon Podmore—in his work on the composition of the Self in Kierkegaard’s philosophy—notes that: “[through] the internal contemplation of the abyss of sin itself, the gaze of guilt becomes a narcissistic dizziness”.<sup>132</sup> In other words, in a state of guilt, humans become weak, unable to return to their former state of innocence, and in guilt each person becomes immersed in the temptations of the material world, and in their own selfish desires, thereby weakening their will, and causing them to submerge ever deeper into a state of shame. For Haufniensis, this kind of egoism forces a person to focus exclusively on the finite, neglecting their relationship with the divine and preventing themselves from living an authentic existence. We shall see that this feeling of guilt is central to the distinction between Kierkegaard’s concepts of *angest* and suffering—while *angest* is rooted in a sense of shame for choosing the temporal world over a relationship with God, suffering, by contrast, encompasses a wider variety of experiences (such as physical pains, feelings of isolation, bereavement, and so on). Unlike suffering, *angest* is linked exclusively to human nature, with the self-awareness of one’s capacity for sin and one’s potential relationship with God.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.45.

<sup>132</sup> Simon D. Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), p.7.

<sup>133</sup> W. Glenn Kirkconnell, *Kierkegaard on Sin and Salvation: From Philosophical Fragments Through the Two Ages* (London: Continuum, 2010), p.50.

While traditionally, Christianity has explained the gulf between humanity and God as a product of inherited sin, Haufniensis refutes this to claim that every person loses their innocence through choice—not sin—by asserting:

sinfulness is not an epidemic that spreads like foot -and mouth disease. That a person can say, in deep earnest, that he was born in misery and his mother conceived him in sin is quite true, but he can truly sorrow over this only if he has brought guilt into the world and brought it upon himself.<sup>134</sup>

From Haufniensis' account it is apparent that it is only once one has immersed oneself in a state of guilt are one is able to recognise the sorrow and distress that is caused by sin. As such, sin has the capacity to alter human perception, moving a person away from a state of ignorance (where the world is still perceived as being in harmony with them), to a position where they can see how they have corrupted themselves. This awakening enables a person to see the consequences of their actions and thus leads him to question the impact their decisions will have on their own future. It is this capability to gauge the possible consequences of our actions that gives rise to Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angest*.

For Kierkegaard, through Haufniensis, the purpose of the reinterpretation of Genesis 3 is to explain the *psychological* state of Adam that led to his sinful transgression. By doing this, Haufniensis puts himself in a position that enables him to draw important conclusions about the psychological states that give rise to sinful activity, and the mental conditions required for a person to recognise their freedom. For Haufniensis, this psychological state is *angest*—a state where an individual is able to acknowledge the possibilities open to them, making them aware both of their need to choose for themselves, and that they are responsible for

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<sup>134</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, pp.46-47.

the outcomes of their choices. This is made clear when Haufniensis discusses Adam pre-fall as a “dreaming Spirit”<sup>135</sup>—a term he uses to denote Adam’s ignorance of his autonomy. For as John R. Cihak comments, anxiety awakens the individual to the possibilities of their freedom. He writes, “anxiety for Adam is the passage from possibility to actuality”,<sup>136</sup> meaning that it was only through Adam’s experience of anxiety that he was able to embrace his freedom. Thus, Haufniensis presents Adam as a person in a state of *angest* (anxiety), for even though he was not aware of the consequences of eating from the tree of knowledge, he was mindful of the fact that God had forbidden such action. For Haufniensis, Adam’s anxious state would have revealed to Adam his freedom and ability to choose to disobey God. In his own work concerning Christianity and anxiety, Cihak suggests that Kierkegaard presents *angest* (or “anxiety” as he defines it) as an existential void, for it highlights the absence of objective truth, in so far as it portrays a person as having a choice to act without awareness of all possible outcomes of their actions, while at the same time, making that person fully accountable for his actions and choices.<sup>137</sup> This awareness of freedom creates, Haufniensis claims, a state of disequilibrium, where the individual becomes aware of their ability to choose and their inability to control the outcomes of their actions. This lack of control leads a person to a state of perpetual fear and unknowing; a state of *angest*, where uncertainty forces an individual to question their own actions in terror of the possibility of their own freedom.<sup>138</sup> In this way, Haufniensis asserts that sin is always born of anxiety, for it is a state of uncertainty that all humans experience before acting.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p.58.

<sup>136</sup> Cihak, *Balthasar and Anxiety*, p.70.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, pp.67-83.

<sup>138</sup> Joshua Furnal, *Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard*, p.148.

Haufniensis recognises this psychological state of *angest* as an exclusively human characteristic, for humanity is, he claims, a synthesis of the psychological and the physical. This synthesis does not simply mean for Haufniensis that a person possesses both body and mind, but that human beings are of finite and infinite nature. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of Kierkegaard's understanding of the 'Self' as both finite and infinite, it is vital to explore the opening passage of *Sygdommen til Døden* [*Sickness Unto Death*] (1849)- a text which many Kierkegaardian scholars suggest is a follow up to *Begrebet Angest*.<sup>139</sup> Here Kierkegaard—this time writing under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus—opens his work with the following explanation of the hybrid nature of the human Self:

A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self. In the relation between two, the relation is the third as a negative unity, and the two relate to the relation and in the relation to the relation; thus under the qualification of the psychical the relation between the psychical and the physical is a relation. If, however, the relation relates itself to itself, this relation is the positive third, and this is the self.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> For more on this see Merold Westphal (1987); and also see Jon Stewart (2009).

<sup>140</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (eds & trans) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p.13.

This opening passage clearly demonstrates that Kierkegaard's notion of the Self comprises a relationship between finite and infinite natures. From this it can be deduced that there are certain aspects of every person that are predetermined and cannot be changed through their individual will (the finite characteristics). We could understand this in physical terms as an allusion to genetic factors that each person has little control over, such as our own height or skin colour. These comprise facets of our unique identity that one has no choice but to accept, if one intends to affirm oneself and act in the world.<sup>141</sup> In conjunction with this, there are other aspects of the human condition that remain undetermined, and which are open to the prospect of change—these aspects enable a person to harness their freedom by allowing them to choose how they present themselves to the world. It is through a person's ability to harness their freedom that they are able to realise their potential, and to affirm their individuality, for freedom enables them to reflect on the world around them and to choose how to act within it.<sup>142</sup> These infinite aspects of one's nature include those that one is free to change, such as one's mental disposition, interests, beliefs and so on. The infinite aspect of the Self constitutes all those aspects of one's identity that one affirms through choice. It also includes the spiritual aspect of a person. Indeed, as will become apparent in the chapters ahead that spirituality is understood as a *choice* by Kierkegaard, as is one's relationship with God, for, he maintains that one must choose to enter into a relationship with the divine. The repercussions of this is that a person's capacity to respond to God is

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<sup>141</sup> Dana R. Wright, 'A Tactical Child-Like Way of Being Human Together: Implications from James Loder's Thought for Post-Colonial Christian-Witness' in *The Logic of the Spirit in Human Thought and Experience: Exploring the Vision of James E. Loder Jr*, Dana R. Wright & Keith J. White (eds) (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2015), p.297.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

infinite in nature, and to become a true Christian a person must freely choose to dedicate themselves to God.<sup>143</sup>

Kierkegaard summarises the relationship between these two aspects of the human condition as a “relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another”.<sup>144</sup> Accordingly, Haufniensis’ concept of the Spirit represents the human capability to relate the physical realm with the psychological realm in order to comprehend their own nature and the temporal world in which they live. Thus, through the unification of the physical and the psychological, Haufniensis maintains that a person can gain an insight into their world - as it is through the physical senses that one is able to obtain data about the world, and once collected, one employs their psychological attributes to interpret the data and store it to memory. Equally, through this psychological-physiological synthesis of understanding, the individual can gain insight into how their psychological choices can impact on their physical life and recognise in the process that their actions have consequences. In this manner, Haufniensis contends that when a person is in a state of innocence, they are yet to understand the impact that their choices can have on their lives, for they have yet to experience *angest* and the demands of responsibility: of having to harness their own free will. As such, the innocent person is discussed by Haufniensis as one who is unable to imagine future prospects, and unable to actively choose between them. The innocent person in this reading has yet to recognise their potential. This is not to say that the innocent, lacks ‘Spirit’, but that the innocent is yet to activate their Spirit through the synthesis of their psychological and physical nature that occurs when one harnesses

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<sup>143</sup>Kristen K. Deede, ‘The Infinite Qualitative Difference: Sin, the Self, and Revelation in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard’, in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* vol.53, no.1 (2003), pp.26-27.

<sup>144</sup>Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, pp.13-14.



their free will.<sup>145</sup> For Haufniensis asserts that by denying the innocent person their Spirit, one denies him or her the possibility of choice. For the innocent person, the future remains uncertain and, arguably, meaningless, as it's devoid of content, and their own prospect has yet to be realised.

It is important to note that *angest* makes choice possible. *Angest* enables us as humans to become aware of our freedom; *angest* is the psychological state that allows us to compose our unique identity and embrace individualism. It is for this reason that Haufniensis talks about *angest*, not so much as governing our choices or forcing us to select specific options, but rather as creating the conditions for choice, enabling us to recognise our potential. This is made clear when Haufniensis states that “anxiety [*angest*] is the dizziness of freedom, which occurs when the Spirit would posit the synthesis, and freedom then gazes down into its own possibility, grasping at finiteness to sustain itself.”<sup>146</sup> Consequently, it is wrong to consider *angest* as a wholly negative aspect of humanity, for it enables our self-awareness, and allows us to embrace personal responsibility. As such, *angest* should be recognised as creating the possibility, not simply of sin, but for positive outcomes, where one identifies with one's freedom in an attempt to affirm life. Moreover, in this way, *angest* can be regarded as possessing an ontological structure, as it is not merely an *emotional* response to specific phenomena, but a *fundamental aspect* of human identity. By uniting the psychological and physiological aspects of human identity, one is able to recognise the most defining characteristic of human identity: one's freedom. Thus, *angest* should be understood as the means by which a person relates to their future prospect, actualizes their free will, and embraces their individualism. For this reason, Haufniensis maintains that

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<sup>145</sup> Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses*, p.18.

<sup>146</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.55.

anxiety should not be understood in terms of a mental disorder but a natural state that enables self-awareness. As shall become clear in Chapter Three (see pages 142-158), it is ultimately *angest*'s association with freedom which provides possible points of comparison to philosophical ideas explored in the Pāli Canon, with both Kierkegaard and the Pāli Canon reinforcing that humanity possesses free will and therefore responsibility for their actions. By examining the connections between *angest* and the Buddhist understanding of free will in Chapter Three, I intend to demonstrate how previous scholarship has misrepresented *angest* and *dukkha*, and the connections between them, at the cost of seeing more meaningful parallels between them that go beyond mere psychological suffering.

Thus far, I have demonstrated that Kierkegaard's *angest* is a unique concept that is rooted in his Christian approach to existentialism.<sup>147</sup> This means that, for Kierkegaard, *angest* is not simply an emotional state, but an aspect of our ontological structure. In Chapter Three, I shall explain how those who equate *angest* with *dukkha* on the grounds that they denote human life as a life plagued by suffering, are failing to acknowledge both the complex theological and existential aspects of Kierkegaard's concept (as well as misrepresenting the Buddhist understanding of *dukkha*, as found in the Pāli Canon). For *angest* has a precise meaning that is employed by Kierkegaard to signify self-awareness and the subsequent angst one feels at the realisation of one's moral autonomy. Equally, by equating *angest* with suffering, scholars ignore<sup>148</sup> Kierkegaard's line of thought, expressed in several of his works, about the nature of human suffering. These works, in particular, *Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand* [*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*] (1847) and *Christelige Taler*

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<sup>147</sup>Sylvia Walsh, *Kierkegaard: Thinking Christianly in an Existential Mode* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.96.

<sup>148</sup> Again, scholars who have made this mistake include Clare Carlisle (2006), Timothy Dalrymple (2010), Jon Stewart (2009), Gordon Marino (2008), Simon D. Podmore (2011) and James B. McCarthy (1980).

[*Christian Discourses*] (1848) are distinct to his *Begrebet Angest*, as they present human suffering as a consequence of our human tendency to formulate attachments to temporal phenomena—an attachment that cannot provide lasting satisfaction. These additional works not only highlight the difference between *angest* and suffering, but also give intriguing insights into the parallels between Kierkegaard’s ideas and Buddhism. It is a great shame, therefore, that these works have been overlooked by scholars such as De Silva and King in their attempts to explore the relationship between Buddhism and Kierkegaard. As such, it is vital, I contend, to give a brief overview of Kierkegaard’s theory of suffering, as this will help us to see how it is distinct from his theory of *angest*, and also, how it resonates with the teachings found within the Pāli Canon.

### Kierkegaard’s twofold model of Suffering

Suffering becomes a significant theme in the later writings of Kierkegaard, specifically in the *Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand* [*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*]<sup>149</sup> and *Christelige Taler* [*Christian Discourses*] – which, when discussed together are known as the *Gospels*. In spite of that the fact Kierkegaard discusses the nature of suffering (*lidelse*) in previous works to these, his 1847 writings mark a transformation in the ‘edifying literature’<sup>150</sup>, in so far as his previous works (published 1843 -1845) lacked the clarity and detail of the later publications. Furthermore, the 1843-1845 publications focus on suffering

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<sup>149</sup> The collection of essays found within this volume is titled ‘*Evangeliet om lidelser*’ (*The Gospel of Sufferings*). This is not to be confused with the term ‘Gospels’ which is the collective noun given to the complete works on suffering found within both the *Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits* and *Christian Discourses*.

<sup>150</sup> The term ‘edifying literature’ is a term used to denote a group of Kierkegaard’s signed writings which are theological in nature and were published between 1843 and 1848.

and religious belief from a general religious perspective,<sup>151</sup> and fail to explore how suffering relates to Christian theology in particular. This has resulted in scholar Michael Olesen interpreting Kierkegaard's earlier publications as revealing only fragments of Kierkegaard's overall conception of suffering and the significance he ascribes to it in human life. I find it especially important, therefore, to focus on what Kierkegaard has to say about suffering in his 1847 and 1848 publications, for they present a more detailed account of Kierkegaard's philosophy, by exploring not only the universal or 'common religious' perspectives found in the earlier writings, but also by concentrating on the Christian tradition with their emphasis on the suffering of Jesus Christ and its role within the life of the Christian. By approaching my analysis in this way, I intend, therefore, to present a more comprehensive account of Kierkegaard's perception of suffering.

In order to engage with Kierkegaard's account of the relationship between suffering and Christianity, Michael Olesen proposes that one must first address how Kierkegaard defines suffering. According to Olesen, this can be a challenging task owing to the complex nature of Kierkegaard's understanding of the subject. Olesen continues to note that if one is to approach the subject with a general definition of suffering in mind, such as, he says, the "experience of unpleasantness or aversion associated with harm or threat of harm in an individual",<sup>152</sup> they will fail to recognise Kierkegaard's unique two-fold model of suffering that he advocates in his later writings.<sup>153</sup> In the rest of this chapter, I will clarify these two aspects to Kierkegaard's model, with, what I construe to be, his portrayal of two distinct forms of suffering that a person will experience according to their chosen approach to life.

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<sup>151</sup> Michael Olesen, 'The Role of Suffering in Kierkegaard's Gospel' in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, (2007), pp.179.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

We shall see that, those who choose the temporal world over a spiritual life (akin to Kierkegaard's notion of the *aesthetic* mode of existence), will suffer from a continuous sense of dissatisfaction, due to their continuous cravings for temporal phenomena, (these cravings—as I shall explain in Chapter Four [see pages 180-202]—possess significant parallels with the Buddhist concept of *kāma-taṇhā*. With Kierkegaard's writings suggesting that becoming attached to temporal phenomena is the cause of human suffering). And those who manage to overcome their material desires will suffer for their spiritual faith, with their alienation from society (akin to Kierkegaard's *religious* mode of existence<sup>154</sup>). While the focus of my work in this respect will explore how these two distinct types of suffering relate to different aspects of the Buddhist notion of *dukkha*, it is important to note that there Kierkegaard's two models of suffering are linked, in the fact that *all* forms of suffering, according to Kierkegaard, are motivation to the individual, and inspire us to seek lasting satisfaction through God. As Oleson asserts: "suffering is seen from an edifying rather than subversive perspective".<sup>155</sup> Later, in Chapters Four (see pages 219-240) and Five (see page 290-296), I shall subsequently explain how Kierkegaard advocates an approach similar to the Third Noble Truth of *nirodha* (cessation of suffering), with the liberation from suffering.

As I mentioned, while the *Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand* and *Christelige Taler* place great emphasis on the relationship between Christianity and suffering, Kierkegaard explores the nature of suffering elsewhere in existential terms. In doing so, he demonstrates that suffering is not exclusively a Christian concern, but one that unites all humans and defines

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<sup>154</sup> The 'religious mode of existence' is characterised by Kierkegaard as a period where one removes themselves from society, rejecting materialistic pleasures in order to direct their lives towards God. For more on this see page 204 – 205.

<sup>155</sup> Olesen, 'The Role of Suffering in Kierkegaard's Gospel', p.179.

human existence. According to Kierkegaard, it would seem therefore that every person is capable of suffering, and, by the same token, all people are capable of liberation from their suffering—regardless of the specific religion or creed to which they subscribe. This is not to say that Kierkegaard claims that faith does *not* have an impact on the way that suffering affects a person; indeed, he maintains that an authentic Christian faith will transform a person's understanding of suffering, and in turn, their attitude towards it, and the affects suffering will subsequently have on the Christian's life. This important aspect points to the two different kinds of suffering that I have alluded to, or which Olesen names 'universal or human suffering' and 'Christian suffering'.<sup>156</sup> A detailed assessment of these two types will prove useful to us in making sense of the essential differences between suffering and *angest*, as our assessment will reveal the fundamental breadth and diversity of suffering, for Kierkegaard. My assessment of the two types of suffering will therefore enable me to underscore the failings of those scholarly works that equate the term 'suffering' with *angest*.

Universal suffering, as the term suggests, relates to the experiences and ways in which suffering affects humanity as a whole, regardless of faith. It especially refers to two distinct philosophies that Kierkegaard develops throughout the later edifying literature. The first denotes that suffering is an inevitable part of life, and secondly, that suffering has a fundamental role in enabling a person to affirm their existence as a unique individual. The first of these is self-explanatory, and I have already discussed it in the preceding paragraph—given this, I shall only address it again very briefly here. Thus, Kierkegaard recognises that suffering is an inevitable part of life. This is alluded to in the *Afsluttende*

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

*uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler* [*Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*] (1846), where he describes how ‘suffering may very well be present everywhere in the various stages of existence’.<sup>157</sup> While Kierkegaard claims that suffering is far more prevalent in the religious stage of life (with its links to Christian suffering), he clearly states that suffering is a collective human experience that every individual will endure. It is clear that, for Kierkegaard, universal suffering refers to those inescapable experiences that are shared by every person, which leads to common feelings, such as physical and mental pain, grief and distress. Thus, similar to the Buddhist conception, Kierkegaard recognises that suffering denotes a wide variety of experiences that impacts on people throughout their lives, should they fail to overcome it.

One may tend to associate this kind of suffering with the kinds of experiences one gets during times of illness or physical injury. However, Olesen indicates that alongside these common associations, it is crucial also to consider the suffering caused by one’s awareness of the temporality of nature—a kind of existential suffering, one might say. For this existential suffering can cause distress when the temporal objects one forms an attachment to—be these material objects, people or ideals—eventually die, decay, or disappear.<sup>158</sup> This issue is highlighted by Kierkegaard early on in his work in his discussion of suffering in the *Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand*, where, for instance, he states that one must approach the world neither ‘loving the world or loved by it’.<sup>159</sup> In this way Kierkegaard alludes to the Biblical teaching (of Mark 10:21) where Jesus asks his disciples to sell their possessions and

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<sup>157</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, Alastair Hannay (ed & trans) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.241.

<sup>158</sup> Olesen, ‘The Role of Suffering in Kierkegaard’s Gospel’, p.180.

<sup>159</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (eds & trans) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.223.

give to the poor.<sup>160</sup> Through this allusion, Kierkegaard suggests that material wealth does not provide lasting happiness, and that true contentment cannot be found through possessions, for material possessions distract humanity, causing a person to be seduced by impermanent trinkets that eventually become tarnished and lose their appeal.

As will become clear in Chapter Four (see pages 180-202), where I contrast Kierkegaard's model of suffering, with the Second Noble Truth, Padmasiri De Silva (1970) implies that the type of suffering caused by the loss of an object of our attachment is particularly relevant to those within Kierkegaard's proposed *aesthetic stage* of life<sup>161</sup>. This is due to the fact that the person in the aesthetic stage (known as the *aesthete*) frequently craves objects or experiences of the material world, be that a particular relationship, event, or the acquisition of an exclusive object.<sup>162</sup> The aesthete will therefore predictably suffer due to their continuous and unquenchable cravings, and the occasion when the object of their current desire is absent, having been lost or destroyed. In light of this, *Evangeliet om Lidelser* [*The Gospel of Sufferings*]<sup>163</sup> seeks to encourage us to reflect on our materialistic nature, and to realise that true satisfaction cannot be found in worldly pursuits; furthermore, if one is to liberate themselves from the suffering caused by our attachments, one must deny themselves of worldly pleasures. It will become apparent, in Chapter Four, that this aspect of Kierkegaard's work shares interesting parallels with both the Second Noble Truth (see pages 161-180), which maintains that *dukkha* arises through one's desire (*taṇhā*) for temporal phenomena, and the Third Noble Truth (see pages 219-240), which is defined by Donald Mitchell (2002)

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p.222.

<sup>161</sup> The aesthetic stage of life is characterised by an individualistic and subjective approach to living, where the individual's only concern is the satisfaction of sensory desires. For more on this see pages 126 – 173.

<sup>162</sup> M. W. Padmasiri De Silva, 'The Critique of Pleasure in Søren Kierkegaard and Early Buddhism', in *The Ceylon Journal of Humanities* vol.1, no.1 (1970), p.13.

<sup>163</sup> *Evangeliet om Lidelser* [*The Gospel of Sufferings*] is a substantial essay on the nature and origin of suffering found within Kierkegaard's *Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand*.



as the “cessation of *dukkha* brought about by the letting go of craving”.<sup>164</sup> Kierkegaard also recognises that this is a demanding goal, and that most people do not have the mental strength to achieve it. For he acknowledges that one need not be rich to have an attachment to worldly pleasure, for while the wealthy may enjoy material prosperity, the beggar can also be devoted to selfish indulgences, be they material, psychological or social.<sup>165</sup> Kierkegaard notes:

[T]hus the beggar unconditionally can deny himself just as well as the king – so also no essential difference is made by what differences are involved in a person’s refraining from self-denial because self-denial is the inwardness to deny oneself.<sup>166</sup>

Similarly, Kierkegaard maintains that each person must freely choose to deny excess, taking no more than they need. This approach should not be understood as a solitary one-off act, but as an act of sacrifice that must be continually affirmed throughout life, for liberation from suffering is a substantial journey that only the most determined can manage.<sup>167</sup> In this way, Kierkegaard highlights that it is possible for any person to escape certain aspects of suffering caused through worldly attachments, regardless of their social, cultural, and religious background; however, the individual must be resolved to turn inward, to sustain an introspective attitude that enables him or her continually to deny the worldly pleasures they otherwise crave.

The second aspect of universal suffering is concerned with ‘the existential task of becoming a single individual’.<sup>168</sup> This is the idea that suffering causes a person to gaze inward, to begin

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<sup>164</sup> Donald Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.50.

<sup>165</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, pp.220-221.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, pp.222-223.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, pp.220-230.

<sup>168</sup> Olesen, ‘The Role of Suffering in Kierkegaard’s Gospel’, p.180.

to question their human condition, and to gain insight their unique individuality, and in turn, the magnitude of their own freedom. Thus, in *Evangeliet om Lidelser*, there are striking parallels with *Begrebet Angest* in so far as both texts explore how a person can come to recognise themselves as unique and distinct beings, and how this impacts on their approach to life. This core theme is explored early in the *Evangeliet om Lidelser* through the metaphor of a mother and child. Here Kierkegaard states: “first the child must learn how to walk by itself, to walk alone, before it can walk the same road as the mother”.<sup>169</sup> Through this image, Kierkegaard implies that every person will ultimately “follow the same path”, meaning that every individual human existence is marked by suffering, for each and every person will suffer both physical and psychological turmoil throughout life. However, while all people are certain to endure suffering, this suffering is experienced within a unique context that is particular to the individual concerned. For when two people befall the same tragedy, their pain is experienced differently and independently of one another. In this way, Kierkegaard claims that the child must learn to “walk alone” as his relationship with the world will be rooted in his own unique, childish experiences. While he can attempt to imitate his mother, and thereby approach his suffering in the same manner as she does, ultimately, he will never be able to engage her suffering in the same fashion, as suffering according to Kierkegaard is determined on a subjective basis. Thus, as the child grows up, he comes to recognise that the suffering he experiences is particular to him, for his emotional response may be different to that of any other individual. In other words, one can never truly gauge the pain of another.

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<sup>169</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, pp.219-220.

It is though one's experience of suffering that one begins to comprehend oneself as an individual. This is because the suffering that is experienced by a person is unique to that person. This is summarised by Kierkegaard as follows: "perhaps no stronger or more gripping or true expression for the most profound trouble and suffering than this: to walk by oneself and to walk alone."<sup>170</sup> This isolation leads one to recognise oneself as a separate being, detached from others by the suffering one endures. Moreover, from this isolation a person comes to recognise themselves as a moral agent—one who is responsible for the decisions they make and is free to choose the direction of their life. This means that, to some extent, a person must take responsibility for the suffering they are forced to endure, as each person is free to decide their place in the world, and should they choose to embrace a materialistic approach to life, they themselves have chosen a life of craving and dissatisfaction. By the same token, Kierkegaard asserts that a person is free to escape the confines of suffering if they follow the example of Christ; as Kierkegaard maintains throughout the *Evangeliet om Lidelser*, liberation from suffering can only be obtained through individual endeavour—when one has willingly eradicated their attachments to the material world and formed a relationship with the infinite.<sup>171</sup> The theological implications of Kierkegaard's insistence that humans are capable of overcoming suffering may, at first, seem to conflict with his approach to liberation—an approach that is akin to the Buddhist approach to liberation. However, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four (see pages 231-236), Kierkegaard recognises that humans are capable of overcoming their attachments to the material world and can subsequently limit the suffering they endure. Kierkegaard here adopts a position similar to the Buddhist conception, by suggesting that a person can limit

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, p.322.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, pp.320-341.

their suffering by recognising the temporal nature of their attachments to “earthly pleasures”<sup>172</sup>. In this way, I shall argue that Kierkegaard proposes a similar approach to the eradication of temporal desires that is advocated in the Pāli Canon.

Within *Evangeliet om Lidelser* Christian suffering is characterised by two distinct concepts, self-denial and obedience. This is made clear early on in *Evangeliet om Lidelser* when Kierkegaard introduces the theme of suffering with clear reference to Matthew 16:24 where he creates a clear connection between suffering and the Christian ideal of “carrying one’s cross”.<sup>173</sup> When Kierkegaard proclaims: “to carry one’s cross means to deny oneself”,<sup>174</sup> he can be understood in psychological or existential terms as putting forward the view that in order to emulate the life of Christ, one must eradicate one’s sense of self-worth by overcoming personal desires and attachments. It is important to note that Kierkegaard is not suggesting that Christians are forced to endure unique afflictions as a result of their belief. Indeed, concepts, such as self-denial and obedience, should not be understood as *forms* of suffering, but rather as *means* of relating to the suffering that Christians endure.<sup>175</sup> Thus, through self-denial and obedience, Christians are able to embrace suffering, recognising that such experiences have spiritual implications. Indeed, self-denial and obedience in particular, are regarded as virtues exhibited by Christ, for Jesus continually denies himself worldly pleasures, focusing instead on showing compassion for his fellow man. Equally, Jesus is obedient to the will of the Father, suffering on the cross in order to fulfil the Father’s divine plan. These points are made evident by Kierkegaard when he states that: “Christ walked in the lowly form of a servant, indigent, forsaken, mocked, not loved by

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<sup>172</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.317.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p.221.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Olesen, ‘The Role of Suffering in Kierkegaard’s Gospel’, p.182.

the world".<sup>176</sup> Consequently, both self-denial and obedience should be understood, in Kierkegaard's terms, as a means of imitating Christ, so that the Christian is able to approach suffering as Jesus did. This means that the Christian will recognise suffering as a necessity, for suffering can allow the Christian to become closer to God, and also allows him or her to realise suffering is an inevitable part of life. Through such recognition, Christians should find the strength to embrace suffering, and not to fear it. To embrace suffering as an expression of Christian faith.<sup>177</sup>

It is my contention that while Olesen's work offers a detailed insight into Kierkegaard's suggestions for an appropriate Christian response to "universal suffering", Olesen's assertion that the *Evangeliet om Lidelser* does not allude to any forms of suffering that are unique to Christianity is incorrect. Indeed, the final chapters of *Evangeliet om Lidelser* explore the demands of Christian faith and how the attempt to imitate Christ can result in unique forms of suffering. It is this idea that forms the foundation of Peter Vardy's (2012) analysis of *Evangeliet om Lidelser*, where he names specific forms of Christian suffering as the persecution that people of faith endure at the hands of the rest of society<sup>178</sup>, and the pains associated with trying to become a unique (*enestående*) Self (*Ånd*) before God.<sup>179</sup> The first of these forms is a common theme that underpins both texts of *Evangeliet om Lidelser*, particularly those passages where Kierkegaard likens those of true Christian faith to the early apostles. For Kierkegaard believed that the established Church in Denmark did not

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<sup>176</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.223.

<sup>177</sup> Lee C. Barrett, 'The Resurrection' in *Kierkegaard and the Bible. Tomb II: The New Testament*, Lee C. Barrett and Jon Bartley Stewart (eds) (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), p.178.

<sup>178</sup> Whilst both Kierkegaard and Vardy allude to the persecution of the early Christians at the hand of the Romans as evidence of a unique form of Christian suffering, it must be noted that Professor Candida Moss (2013) maintains that the traditional idea of the "Age of Martyrdom" is largely fictional. She contends that many of the stories associated with martyrs at the order of the Roman Emperor are fictional or have been heavily exaggerated. For more on this see Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution* (2013).

<sup>179</sup> Peter Vardy, *An Introduction to Kierkegaard* (London: SPCK, 2008), p.85.

represent true Christianity, but rather, that the central purpose of Christianity was to establish an individual and personal relationship with God—one that is achievable only through *living* a life of faith by recognising Christ as the prototype (*forbilledede*) to imitate.<sup>180</sup> Thus, for Kierkegaard, those who are truly faithful to God are subject to persecution not simply by non-Christians, but also those inauthentic ‘Christians’ who practise a formalised and rigid version of Christianity, for the Church encourages its members to place dogma and ritual over a personally meaningful and authentic relationship with God.<sup>181</sup> This means that to members of the organised Church, the path to God is through the work of the clergy and liturgy. This path, he claims, fails to comprehend the significance of imitating (*efterligne*) Christ, and has subsequently led them to remain committed and attached to the temporal world, accumulating material wealth, and in the process, refusing to sacrifice (*ofre*) themselves before their Lord. As such, the self-sacrificing (*selvopofrende*) approach of the authentic Christian is something which the organised Church seeks to oppress, endeavouring to force the Christian to conform to its institutionalised approach to religion. As Kierkegaard notes:

This slavery is not that one person wants to subjugate many (then one would, of course, become aware), but that individuals, when they forget the relation to God, become mutually afraid of one another; the single individual becomes afraid of the more or of the many, who in turn each one out of fear of people and forgetting God, stick together and form the crowd, which renounces the nobility of eternity that is granted to each and every one – to be individual.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Mallory Fitzpatrick, ‘Kierkegaard and the Church’, in *The Journal of Religion* vol.27, no.4 (1947), p.258.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, p.257.

<sup>182</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.327.

Consequently, Kierkegaard infers that the authentic Christian is concerned with eternity (*evighed*) rather than the temporal world and has become isolated from the Church and wider Christian community through their persecuted for failing to conform to the rigid practices of the Church. In this way, Kierkegaard likens true Christians to the apostles who stand by their convictions in the face of persecution,<sup>183</sup> for they are willing to deny (*nægte*) themselves the pleasures of the material world in order to approach life in the same manner to Christ. As Kierkegaard states: “to follow Christ means, then, to deny oneself and means to walk the same road.”<sup>184</sup> Thus, as Christ suffered persecution at the hands of the Pharisees and the Romans, so too, the Christian must expect to suffer rejection at the hands of their own society; it is this torment that distinguishes the life of the individual who lives a life of faith from the one without. In his exploration of Kierkegaard’s theology, Vardy comments that the Christian’s acceptance of persecution by others signifies the Christian’s achievement of placing God at the centre of their life—this acceptance, Vardy suggests, demonstrates the Christian is not defeated in his or her rejection by others, for they are able to approach life from an eternal perspective, where only divine judgement matters.<sup>185</sup> Persecution for the Christian, therefore, is something to be welcomed, as it is testament to their dedication to God. In this sense, suffering is a means to liberation, for it represents the shift from in desire from the temporal realm to the eternal.

The second type of suffering that Kierkegaard associates exclusively with the Christian life is the suffering that is inevitable to those who attempt to emulate Christ, and who place God at the centre of their life. Kierkegaard makes it clear that this is a demanding task:

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, pp.325-332.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, p.223.

<sup>185</sup> Vardy, *An Introduction to Kierkegaard*, p.85.

This is the test: to become and to remain a Christian, through the sufferings with which no other human sufferings can compare in painfulness and anguish. Yet it is not Christianity that is cruel, nor is it Christ. No, Christ in himself is gentleness and love itself; the cruelty consists in the fact that the Christian has to live in this world and express in the environment of this world what it is to be a Christian... But the more the Christian is thus inwardly in fear and trembling before God, so much the more is he in dread of every false step, so much the more is he inclined only to accuse himself. In this situation it might sometimes be a comfort to him if others thought well of him. But exactly the opposite is the case... the more he labours in fear and trembling, struggling all the more to be entirely unselfish, devoted and loving, all the more do men accuse him of self-love.<sup>186</sup>

This passage clearly shows that Kierkegaard considers the authentic Christian lifestyle as one in conflict with the temporal world in which the Christian otherwise lives. The Christian is therefore challenged with the task of overcoming their selfish desires and attachments in order to devote themselves to the eternal. This is an arduous task, as the temporal world offers many distractions, tempting the Christian with material desires—a temptation that reflects Christ’s temptation in the desert (Matthew 4: 1-11). The Christian is called upon to resist temptation and thereby recognise that the temporal world is limited, and that it is only through relation to God that their “eternal consciousness” (*evig bevidsthed*), as Kierkegaard puts it, can ever be truly satisfied.<sup>187</sup> Alongside this, the Christian is called upon

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<sup>186</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity: And the Edifying Discourse Which “Accompanied” It*, Walter Lowrie (ed & trans) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp.194-195.

<sup>187</sup> Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (eds & trans) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp.323-324.



to recognise that it is not for them to question or blame God for their sufferings, but to admit that “in relation to God a person always suffers as guilty”.<sup>188</sup>

According to Greg Malantschuk (1971), Kierkegaard’s position means that the Christian must recognise that only Christ suffered as an innocent, and that they themselves, as Christ’s followers, are deserving of the sufferings they endure. For unlike Christ, humans have trespassed against God, and thus have to acknowledge that even though they are now attempting to imitate Christ, they will never be Christ; they remain lacking, and remain guilty (*skyldig*). Therefore, it is through suffering that they find the means to prove their discipleship (*discipelskab*), and the value of relationship with God over the temporal world.<sup>189</sup> Similarly, Vardy states that this journey is made more difficult by the “complete absence of any guarantee”<sup>190</sup>, or assurance that their sacrifice of the temporal world will be rewarded. The subjectivity (*subjektivitet*) of faith (*tro*) means that the Christian may have continually to wrestle with doubt (*tvivl*), living in a perpetual state of suspicion, and lack of satisfaction in temporal, earthly existence. According to Vardy, this means that a life of Christian faith requires the Christian to accept turmoil and uncertainty—a life of questioning whether they are truly in a relation with God, or whether they have embraced a life of suffering with no prospect of reward. This tension ensures that the Christian can never escape suffering, as their life of faith requires them to take continual ‘leaps to faith’: a continual affirmation of their devotion to God.<sup>191</sup>

It is important to note that even though Kierkegaard upholds suffering as the hallmark of the Christian life, this suffering is essentially *joyous*. Kierkegaard asserts that “what whole

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<sup>188</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.264.

<sup>189</sup> Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, p.322.

<sup>190</sup> Vardy, *An Introduction to Kierkegaard*, p.86.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, pp.86-87.

world calls ruin, that what the whole world works on in the belief that it is ruin, that this, for faith's secret with God, is victory".<sup>192</sup> It is clear that, for Kierkegaard, the suffering experienced by the Christian is, ultimately, a positive aspect of human life that signifies the possibility of choosing a religious life over an aesthetic life by rejecting the temporal and affirming the eternal life through Christ. By taking this approach to suffering, Kierkegaard sets himself apart from the established Church and therefore general Christian beliefs of his time, for he considers suffering not as a *result* of sin, but as the *means* to bringing Christians closer to Christ, in an experience that is ultimately joyous. By freely choosing to embrace suffering in imitation of Christ, the Christian chooses a situation that allows faith to take president over finite and aesthetic concerns.<sup>193</sup>

### Summary

From my research, I have ascertained that Kierkegaard's philosophy emphasises both *angest* and suffering as key and distinctive impacts on the life of the individual. Anxiety is the 'dizzying effect' of human freedom, an ontological state that enables humans to discover their potential and choose how to respond to the world. For "[a]nxiety is an attribute of the dreaming spirit",<sup>194</sup> that allows a person to recognise themselves as a unique individual, uniting the physical and psychological aspects of human nature. Anxiety allows a person to reflect on the meaning of their existence, furnishing them with the freedom and the possibility of choice. In this respect, *angest* "tempts its possibility",<sup>195</sup> allowing each of us to

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<sup>192</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.335.

<sup>193</sup> Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, pp.321-324.

<sup>194</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.51.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

forge our own, unique future. *Angest* moves beyond a simple emotional response to comprise a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human. As Joshua Furnal (2016) states “anxiety is how freedom presents itself”.<sup>196</sup>

Kierkegaard’s understanding of suffering differs greatly to his understanding of *angest*. Even though Kierkegaard recognises suffering as a universal phenomenon, he does not regard it as an ontological condition. Kierkegaard uses the term ‘suffering’ to denote those difficult or unpleasant experiences that all humans inevitably endure; he sees it as a response to external factors that challenge humanity and cause either physical or emotional turmoil. Thus, while *angest* is an unavoidable consequence of becoming a Self, suffering, for Kierkegaard, is an inevitable product of our engagement with the temporal world. In this respect, one could infer that *angest* is an internal process of ‘Self-becoming’, while suffering is a reaction to external stimuli.

It is due to this distinction between terms that we can recognise that the individual can be liberated from suffering, while *angest* endures. Indeed, within *Evangeliet om Lidelser*, Kierkegaard claims that “the good is so infinitely superior to the means that even in the heaviest moment of suffering the consciousness that it is procuring an eternal weight of glory”.<sup>197</sup> From this, it is clear that, unlike *angest*, which cannot be surpassed or escaped from, as it is a fundamental condition of human nature, one can overcome suffering through faith. This suggests that suffering has a motivational quality that enables the individual to move towards the divine and to engage in relationship with it.

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<sup>196</sup> Furnal, *Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard*, p.147.

<sup>197</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.312.

Further to this, both suffering and *angest* should be understood as having a different impact on the individual's relation to God. On the one hand, suffering is depicted by Kierkegaard as having a uniting factor; he writes: "when one suffers as guilty and when one acknowledges it he has hope in God".<sup>198</sup> In other words, through enduring the difficulties of the temporal world, Kierkegaard suggests that one becomes more aware of the infinite realm, using faith as a means of strength to help one cope with distress. We can infer from this that for the authentic Christian, suffering is a means to an end, for suffering can lead people to form an individual relationship with God, which is the ultimate goal according to Kierkegaard. Thus, even though suffering can isolate the Christian from society, in their embrace of it, the Christian can move towards God. In parallel to this, suffering also enables the Christian to comprehend the sufferings of Christ. For Kierkegaard asserts: "just as Jesus was despised and rejected by the crowd, so will any who follow him".<sup>199</sup> In this way, Vardy suggests that Kierkegaard presents Jesus as a prototype—as the one who has already overcome suffering and can thus teach others to do the same. As such, the Christian does not have to feel isolated during times of suffering, for he is not truly alone, for Christ has suffered as man, revealing to all true Christians the way to overcome suffering.<sup>200</sup> Hence Christ can be seen as a source of strength during times of hardship.

By contrast, *angest* is always a source of isolation on both a temporal and an eternal level. In a temporal sense, *angest* enables a person to recognise their individuality, for it is within periods of anxiety that they realise they are responsible for their own decisions. As Alison Leigh Brown (1995) implies, *angest* reveals to the individual that they are by nature split

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, p.273.

<sup>199</sup> Vardy, *An Introduction to Kierkegaard*, p.84.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, pp.84-85.

beings, caught between their past and their uncertain future, and it emphasises their responsibility as free agents to direct themselves through their choices and actions.<sup>201</sup> According to Kierkegaard, this realisation can terrify a person, for the pressure of moral agency and responsibility for one's choices (both intended and unintended) can be overwhelming. This realisation of freedom and accountability leads one to feel disconnected from society, for one is forced to see one's unique individuality and accept that they are the masters of their potential becoming. Equally, *angest* makes one feel separated from God, for freedom brings the possibility of sin—of choosing to place one's temporal needs above relationship with the eternal.<sup>202</sup> Consequently, Podmore contends that *angest* denotes “the possibility of being alone in the world forgotten by God”,<sup>203</sup> for *angest* represents human self-consciousness and the awareness that God forbids certain actions, as outlined in the Christian Decalogue or the epistles of St. Paul, which forbid action such as adultery or idolatry. If a person chooses to undertake such actions, they are capable of understanding that they have defied God and broken relationship with the eternal. While suffering enables a person to establish a meaningful relationship with God, *angest* highlights the threat of isolation from God. By choosing to embrace the temporal over the eternal, a person alienates themselves from God.

It is also evident that according to Kierkegaard suffering and *angest* express different approaches to the material world. For one of the primary messages of *Evangeliet om Lidelser* is that humans must sever their attachment to the material world in order to find true satisfaction: Kierkegaard states that: “lantern-light of temporality is always just as

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<sup>201</sup> Alison Leigh Brown, ‘God, Anxiety, and Female Divinity,’ in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, Martin Joseph Matušík & Merold Westphal (eds) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p.66.

<sup>202</sup> Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God*, p.5.

<sup>203</sup> Simon D. Podmore, ‘To Die and Yet Not Die: Kierkegaard’s Theophany of Death’, in *Kierkegaard And Death*, Patrick Stokes & Adam Buben (eds) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), p.52.

dangerous as blind guidance in the dark”.<sup>204</sup> Kierkegaard held that people who were enthralled with the material pleasures of the temporal world were ‘self-deceived’, as they have allowed themselves to become immersed in a world of dissatisfaction, where their fleeting interests will always be subject to change and decay, never bringing lasting happiness. This, for Kierkegaard, is one of the most common forms of suffering that humans are forced to endure, and it is ultimately brought on through a person’s inability to recognise the impermanent nature of the material world. Accordingly, Kierkegaard believes that our preoccupation with the material world ensures that we are “no longer able to see eternity”.<sup>205</sup> That is to say, we have become so entrenched in the materialistic approach to life that we tend to be blind to the fact that there is a means to end the suffering we inevitably feel. In this way, the material world prevents us from attaining true happiness, separating us from God and causing constant pain.

The relationship between a person and the material world, however, is more complex than the model presented by Kierkegaard in *Evangeliet om Lidelser*. On one level, Kierkegaard gives us a clear warning that if we are tempted by offerings of the material world, we choose to sin. However, due to Kierkegaard’s psychological approach in *Evangeliet om Lidelser*, the dangers of placing the temporal over the eternal are not discussed. It is because of this, we have seen, that Haufniensis as Kierkegaard’s mouthpiece, introduces the reader to the idea that Adam’s sin is rooted in his craving for temporal pursuits. But at the same time, Haufniensis does not explain to the reader that by favouring the material over the eternal, they, too, will lead a life marked by dissatisfaction. This is because within *Evangeliet om Lidelser* Kierkegaard focuses on the nature of the Self, examining how a

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<sup>204</sup>Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.310.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

person comes to recognise themselves as a unique individual, and the impact this realisation can have on their approach to the world. This work does not reveal to the reader the possibility of liberation (*befrielse*), or how to form a relation with the divine. As such, it could be suggested that this particular work is rooted in the temporal world, for its main purpose is to discuss the psychological process that enables us to make decisions, as opposed to exploring the theological ramifications of making certain decisions.

This is not to say, however, that there are no parallels between suffering and *angest*. For Kierkegaard presents both concepts as important ways in which a person can recognise he or she is distinct from their peers as a unique and individual identity. For, within *Evangeliet om Lidelser*, Kierkegaard maintains that suffering, like *angest*, is experienced on a personal level, and that despite both suffering and *angest* being experiences that are available to all people, no person is capable of comprehending the experience of another's suffering or *angest*. For both suffering and *angest* are highly subjective, leading people to respond to their experiences in unique ways according to how they choose to react to the world. Both suffering and *angest* can therefore be seen as conditions that facilitate our choice and capacity to choose, with *angest* expressing human freedom, and suffering forcing one to choose between the temporal and eternal. Thus, according to Kierkegaard, both concepts are at the centre of our understanding of ourselves as individuals and how we react to our choices within the world. Likewise, it could also be argued that despite the negative associations ordinarily ascribed to *angest* and suffering both seem to have positive connotations, with *angest* revealing one's true nature as a free being and suffering motivating one to look beyond the finite world in order to establish a relationship with the infinite.

Overall, it is clear that despite the similarities between *angest* and suffering, both concepts play a unique role within Kierkegaard's philosophy, with anxiety used as a means to explore freedom, and suffering as a tool to explore liberation. Consequently, it is vital that when exploring Kierkegaard's relationship with Buddhism that these two notions are treated as distinct from one another, for while both have clear correspondences with Buddhist philosophy, they relate to Buddhist teachings in ways that are unique to their own content. As such, I shall now turn in the next chapter to assess how each concept relates to Buddhism in turn.



### Chapter Three: A Re-Evaluation of the Relationship Between Angest and Dukkha

As was made clear in my review and assessment of the few academic works that explore the parallels between Kierkegaard and Buddhist philosophy, the concept of *angest* is often emphasised as a key theme to unite the two. This emphasis has led to a common misconception among the scholars who have previously been discussed, such as Lynn De Silva, Douglas J. Elwood, Huston Smith and Winston King who tend to present *angest* as synonymous with, and equivalent to, the concept of *dukkha* (often described as suffering). This misconception, found within the works of the aforementioned scholars, attempts to explore the relevance of Christian theology within an Asian context. The primary concern of this scholarship seems to be the creation of an interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Asian philosophy, with a view to illustrating the extent to which Asian philosophy can be enriched through its embrace of specific aspects of Christian philosophy or practice. However, in attempting to establish this dialogue, scholars frequently forge and enforce unrealistic alliances between the two, thereby arriving at unhelpful and skewed conclusions. More often than not, these attempts fail to recognise the complexity of either *angest* or *dukkha* in their summations. For example, within his 1980 publication *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes*, theologian Douglas J. Elwood, asserts that “anxiety covers much of what *dukkha* means”.<sup>206</sup> Similarly, in his 1965 publication *Condemned to meaning*, Huston Smith alleges that “for the Buddha, it was *dukkha*, an unsatisfactoriness grounded in life’s impermanence and dependence, [whereas] Kierkegaard Christened it anxiety”.<sup>207</sup> It is

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<sup>206</sup> Douglas J. Elwood, *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes* (London: Westminster Press, 1980), p.222.

<sup>207</sup> Huston Smith, *Condemned to Meaning* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p.47.

evident from these two brief examples that both scholars have been content to make simplistic assessments about the complex notions of *angest* and *dukkha*, with little regard for their significant differences. From this, we can deduce that much of the existing literature within the field has been tarnished by attempts of numerous scholars to forge points of interfaith dialogue, without recourse to the complexities that such dialogue necessarily involves, and, likewise, to force a harmonious system of thought out of Kierkegaard's existentialism and Buddhist philosophy, when a more academically rigorous approach to these approaches reveals significant differences between the two.

I therefore intend to take a more stringent approach to this aspect of the comparison between Kierkegaard and Buddhism, one that establishes a more accurate understanding of the parallels that exist between *angest* and Buddhist philosophy. I shall therefore pay attention, not simply to how these two philosophical traditions are comparable to one another, and share significant similarities to each other, but, also, how they are distinct and fundamentally different in their outlooks. I shall do this by providing a detailed explanation of how the concept of *dukkha* is presented within the Pāli texts, in its three distinct forms (see pages 98-115). These three forms—namely *dukkha-dukkha*, *vipariṇāma-dukkha* and *saṅkhārā-dukkha*—emphasise the different forms of *dukkha* that are experienced throughout life, with each having a different cause and each manifesting itself differently throughout a person's life. By approaching *dukkha* in this manner, I intend to explore how each of these modes of suffering has a unique relationship with Kierkegaard's conception of *angest*, with only one of these three modes having the potential for a meaningful parallel. Equally, I shall ensure that I provide a detailed analysis of specific concepts that are

traditionally connected to *dukkha*—such as *uddhacca-kukkucca*<sup>208</sup> (see pages 134-138), and the five aggregates<sup>209</sup> (see pages 108-112) - in order to explain why *dukkha* and *angest* have often been used interchangeably to characterise the human condition. My analysis in this chapter will attempt to assert that the relationship between *dukkha* and *angest* is more complex than both Elwood and by Smith suggest above. For, in order to indicate that parallels exist between the two terms, one must first recognise that *dukkha* is somewhat of an umbrella term that is used to signify a broad range of experiences, not all of which are applicable to the ideas of Kierkegaard.

### The Significance of Dukkha

To establish the extent in which *dukkha* is similar to *angest*, it is necessary first to examine how it is understood, and its significance within a Buddhist context. The idea of *dukkha* was first introduced in the Buddha's foremost sermon, delivered to five ascetics<sup>210</sup> in Isipatana (modern Sarnath), as part of the doctrine of *Cattāri ariyasaccāni* (the Four Noble Truths). Recorded in the *Saccasaṃyutta*, the Buddha revealed throughout this sermon a progressive series of "Truths" that together address the conditions that characterise the existence of all

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<sup>208</sup> *Uddhacca-Kukkucca* is the fourth of the five hinderances (five mental states that hinder or prevent meditative progress). Whilst it is most commonly translated as 'restlessness' and 'worry', many commentators have linked it the western term 'anxiety', due to its association with an individuals concern over their own future. At present I have found no academic literature that examines this particular term in light of Kierkegaard's *angest*, despite there being very clear parallels.

<sup>209</sup> The five aggregates, also referred to as the five *khandhas* (meaning 'heap' or 'bundle'), refer to the five physical and psychological factors that make up an individual, according to Buddhist tradition. This doctrine will be explored in more depth later in this chapter.

<sup>210</sup> The five ascetics are widely regarded within Buddhism as five former companions of the Buddha. It is believed that the Buddha had practiced asceticism with the five, before rejecting the practice of austerities. According to the *Saccasaṃyutta* (SN 56:11), the five were initially apperhensive of the now-enlightend Siddhāttha, but soon recognised his profound transformation, and in the process, became his first followers.

sentient beings and the means of overcoming suffering. Within the *sutta* (SN 56:14) the Buddha introduces the Truths by proclaiming:

Bhikkhus, there are these Four Noble Truths. What four? The noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the origin of suffering, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.<sup>211</sup>

Accordingly, Buddhist philosophy traditionally presents the *Cattāri ariyasaccāni* in the following way. The first Noble Truth is held as *dukkha*, often presented as ‘the truth of the existence of suffering’.<sup>212</sup> The second of the truths is *samudaya*, which explores the origins behind suffering. The third truth, *nirodha*, is linked to the cessation of suffering; and the final truth, *magga*, is the means or path that will lead to the end of suffering.

Together the Four Noble Truths are considered to be the foundation on which Buddhist philosophy rests, as the as the scholar of Theravāda Buddhism the Venerable K. Sri Dhammānanda Maha Thera asserts: “To realise these Truths is to realise and penetrate into the nature of existence, including the full knowledge of oneself”.<sup>213</sup> It is clear that the significance of the Four Noble Truths rests in the fact that they enable a practitioner to move from a state of *avijjā* (ignorance) to a state of *vijjā* (knowledge). They allow one to comprehend the true nature of reality, and to recognise that the temporal world is

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<sup>211</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya* by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2000), p.1848.

<sup>212</sup> It should be noted here that scholars such as Edward D. Andrews (2018) have rejected the term suffering as an exact translation for the term *dukkha*, suggesting it can lead to significant misunderstanding about the nature of Buddhism. This will be explored in depth throughout this chapter.

<sup>213</sup> K. Sri Dhammananda Maha Thera, ‘What Buddhists Believe: Four Noble Truths’ <http://www.budsas.org/ebud/whatbudbelieve/74.htm>, 13 January 2017.

transitory, “void of any essential reality”,<sup>214</sup> and, as such, is unable to provide lasting satisfaction. In response to this, the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths advocates that one *can* find lasting satisfaction,<sup>215</sup> through mental discipline and the cultivation of knowledge. Therefore, the Four Noble Truths are understood as a means of liberation—a doctrine that, when followed, releases one from the bonds of *saṃsāra*, to the joys of *Nibbāna*. This transformative aspect of the Four Noble Truths is made explicit in the *Saccasaṃyutta* (SN 56:21) of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, where the Buddha declares: “Bhikkhus, it is because of not understanding and not penetrating the Four Noble Truths that you and I have roamed and wandered through this long course of *saṃsāra*”.<sup>216</sup> In Chapter Four (see pages 240-249), we shall see that the possibility of liberation from *dukkha* signifies the starkest contrast between Kierkegaard’s philosophy and the teachings of the Pāli texts. This is because Kierkegaard’s conviction that humans aren’t able to overcome *angest* means that a person will always be subject to the emotional uncertainty that arises in relation to their free will. Consequently, I wish to expose the differences between *dukkha* and *angest*, which are rooted in the fact that *angest* is all-pervading and gives rise to emotional turmoil that cannot be overcome, whilst the third noble truth, *nirodha*, proclaims that it is possible to become liberated from *dukkha*.

The concept of *dukkha* plays a central role in motivating an individual to strive for liberation, and as such, it clearly holds a significant status within the practice of Buddhism. *Dukkha* is understood as a universal condition that impacts the lives of all beings—affecting not only one’s relationship with the temporal world, but, as will be made evident throughout the

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> This idea has clear parallels with Kierkegaard’s work *The Gospel of Suffering*, this will be explored throughout Chapter Four.

<sup>216</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1852.

course of this chapter, impeding one's sense of 'self'.<sup>217218</sup> In this way, *dukkha* has been described by the Venerable Ajahn Sumedho (a practitioner and scholar Theravāda Buddhism) as "the common bond we all share",<sup>219</sup> as it is suffering that shapes every person's experiences and approach to life. By recognising the First Noble Truth (that suffering impacts on in the life of every sentient being), Buddhists acknowledge that *dukkha* ultimately shapes how an individual relates to the temporal world, to other beings, and also themselves.

### The Meaning of Dukkha

Scholar of Theravāda Buddhism, Walpola Sri Rahula (1959) recognises that *dukkha* is a complex term that denotes far more than the traditional English translation of 'suffering'. He laments the fact that Western scholarship tends to misrepresent the First Noble Truth (*dukkha ariya sacca*) as a doctrine that advocates the notion that "life according to Buddhism is nothing but suffering and pain,"<sup>220</sup> and, as a consequence, Western commentators approach Buddhism pessimistically, characterising human life as the absence of lasting satisfaction.<sup>221</sup> Rahula's criticism of Western translations of *dukkha* is shared by

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<sup>217</sup> V. F. Gunaratna, *The Significance of the Four Noble Truths* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1968), pp.3-9.

<sup>218</sup> It should be noted here that the term 'self' has radically different implications within the works of Kierkegaard and Buddhism. The term 'self' is used within Kierkegaard's work to denote the unification of the finite and infinite aspects of an individual. A state where they are able to recognise there are both able to recognise their freedom and thus ability to relate to God. In this way the term 'self' can be seen to have an eternal element. Within Buddhism however, the notion of an eternal self is rejected. Thus, the term 'self' is understood as a misunderstanding of human nature, where one is deluded into thinking of themselves in terms of 'I' or 'myself' failing to recognise that their true nature is impermanent and ultimately the product of fleeting relationships between the five aggregates. This distinction will be explored in more detail later within this chapter.

<sup>219</sup> Venerable Ajahn Sumedho, 'The Four Noble Truths', <http://www.haikong.ca/dhamma/4nobltru.pdf>, p.9, 12 February 2017.

<sup>220</sup> Walpola Sri Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (Bedford: Oneworld Publications, 2011), p.16.

<sup>221</sup> Heinrich Dumoulin, *Understanding Buddhism* (Boston: Weatherhill, 1994), p.24.

scholar of Buddhism, David R. Loy,<sup>222</sup> who also regards ‘suffering’ as too narrow a definition, and as one that fails to express the essential realism that is at the heart of the First Noble Truth.<sup>223</sup> As such, both Rahula and Loy emphasise that *dukkha* should not be regarded as either a pessimistic or optimistic outlook, given that the First Noble Truth is a more encompassing, and “realistic view of life and of the world”.<sup>224</sup> *Dukkha*, for these two scholars, is therefore, is a manner in which a person can perceive the world objectively (*yāthabhūtam*)—an approach that provides insight into the true nature of the material world, and reveals a path to liberation. This interpretation of *dukkha* is developed further in the work of Bhikkhu Thanissaro, who compares the Buddha and his teachings about *dukkha* to that of a physician who focuses on the disease he is trying to cure. Thanissaro suggests that “charging him [the Buddha] with pessimism is like charging a doctor with pessimism when he asks, ‘Where does it hurt?’”.<sup>225</sup> Thanissaro contends, therefore, that the First Noble Truth is concerned ultimately with encouragement—in particular, encouraging a practitioner to accept that life is difficult, and does not bring the satisfaction that all beings crave; but, that an acceptance of these truths, can bring new-found motivation for liberation from the difficulties of life, and the acquisition of unalloyed happiness. The work of Bhikkhu Thanissaro also highlights a distinction between *angest* and *dukkha* in his assertion that *dukkha* expresses a general dissatisfaction with life that humans long to eradicate. Thus, *dukkha* differs from *angest* because *angest* does not signify feelings of dissatisfaction with one’s life, but, rather, an intense fear of the consequences of being free.

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<sup>222</sup> Whilst Loy is a practitioner of Zen Buddhism, as opposed to Theravada, which is the primary focus of my thesis, his work here is not focused on one specific Buddhist school. Rather his article is focused on the nature of *dukkha* as the foundation of all Buddhist movements.

<sup>223</sup> David R. Loy, ‘Dukkha’, <https://www.lionsroar.com/the-suffering-system/>, 19 June 2017.

<sup>224</sup> Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, p.17.

<sup>225</sup> Bhikkhu Thanissaro ‘The Four Noble Truths: A Study Guide’, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/study/truths.html>, 15 February 2017.

*Dukkha*, therefore, is wide-reaching as it encompasses a range of experiences, from physical pain, to unsatisfied cravings; whilst *angest* is ingrained in one's inability to accept one's infinite nature.

It is evident from the works of Rahula, Loy, and Thanissaro that pessimistic interpretations of the First Noble Truth fail to recognise the complexity of Buddhist philosophy. By failing to explore the significant role that 'happiness' plays within wider Buddhist philosophy, commentators inevitably depict a diluted account of the Buddha's teachings. Indeed, throughout his teachings, the Buddha recognises various forms of happiness that arise in our experience of the temporal world. Support for this is found in the *Āṅguttara-Nikāya*, where the Buddha expounds on the various manifestations of happiness throughout life.

Rahula summarises the account as follows:

There is a list of happiness (*sukhani*), such as the happiness of family life and the happiness of the life of a recluse, the happiness of sense pleasures and the happiness of renunciation, the happiness of attachment and the happiness of detachment, physical happiness and mental happiness, etc...<sup>226</sup>

The teachings of *Āṅguttara-Nikāya* can therefore be interpreted as a discourse on the affirmation of happiness as a reality that impacts on the lives of both the monastic and lay practitioners of Buddhism. These teachings suggest that lay practitioners will find moments of joy through their attachments to temporal phenomena, for example by discovering happiness in the accomplishments of their children, or even when purchasing a luxury item.

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<sup>226</sup> Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, pp.17-18.



Similarly, those who have joined the monastic *saṅgha*, are thought to enjoy their own accomplishments in their journey towards detachment. From examples such as this, it is evident that when commentators, as such Colin Feltham (2017), liken *dukkha* to his own understanding of ‘depressive realism’, or define the First Noble Truth as a doctrine that conveys life as ultimately depressive and nihilistic,<sup>227</sup> they are not only misrepresenting, but *negating*, significant aspects of the Buddha’s teachings. As such Feltham, has failed to recognise that the Buddha acknowledges ‘happiness’ as an achievement throughout one’s temporal existence; even though such experiences of happiness are impermanent, they can still be affirmed and enjoyed, however fleetingly. In light of this, one could argue that it is erroneous to suggest that Buddhism depicts a life of constant misery or despair. Rather, it recognises a person’s capacity for joy, and, moreover, that people crave such feelings. However, Buddhist philosophy also maintains that happiness is a fleeting experience, and its transitory nature means that lasting satisfaction is unattainable to the unenlightened mind. Rahula seeks to rectify these misconceptions by calling upon practitioners of Buddhism to understand the Buddha’s teachings concerning *dukkha* in terms that are realistic and objective.<sup>228</sup> While (it is possible that) Buddhist practitioners and Western commentators (such as Feltham) may interpret *dukkha* reductively, as ‘suffering,’ ‘misery,’ or ‘pain’, the term has profound philosophical connotations that go unrealised through these definitions. These connotations tend to be recognised by more experienced practitioners of Buddhism, with the revelation of the complex nature of all phenomena within the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Thus, as Bhikkhu Anālayo asserts: “suffering represents only one aspect of *dukkha*”,<sup>229</sup> and

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<sup>227</sup> Colin Feltham, *Depressive Realism: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp.1-2.

<sup>228</sup> Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, p.17.

<sup>229</sup> Bhikkhu Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization* (Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 2006), p.244.

to gauge the true breadth of this term, one needs to examine the original Sanskrit terms from which it derives. For *dukkha* is a Pāli term that is composed of two distinct Sanskrit terms, with the antithetic prefix ‘*duh*’, referring to an aspect of ‘difficulty’, and ‘*kha*’ referring to the “axle-hole of a wheel”.<sup>230</sup> In respect of its etymology, Anālayo asserts that the “complete term [*dukkha*] evokes the image of an axle not fitting properly into its hole”,<sup>231</sup> and that *dukkha*, therefore, refers to a state of ‘friction’ or ‘disharmony’. Interestingly, Anālayo also considers the possibility that *dukkha* could stem from the Sanskrit word ‘*ṣṭha*’ meaning ‘standing’ or ‘abiding’. This again, combined with the antithetic prefix ‘*duh*,’ suggests that *dukkha* could signify the notion of ‘standing badly’-- thus again, expressing a condition that is ‘nuanced’ or ‘uneasy’.<sup>232</sup> In his examination of the etymological root of the word *dukkha*, Anālayo disputes the Western convention of translating *dukkha* as suffering or pain, and alleges that the essence of the term is more accurately defined as ‘unsatisfactory’. Anālayo consequently asserts that the First Noble Truth does not suggest that life consists exclusively of pain or suffering, but rather, that life is characterised by dissatisfaction, whereby happiness is but a fleeting experience.

It should be evident from my discussion thus far that the term *dukkha* is far more complex than is conveyed by its common (mis)translation as ‘suffering’. As Paul Williams (2000) implies, *dukkha* is a “technical expression”<sup>233</sup> that represents more than physical pain and psychological anguish, for *dukkha* expresses the existential situation of being: the fundamental, ontological condition of humanity, and the dissatisfaction this condition can bring to a person; which is to say that, in similar respects to Kierkegaard’s *angest*, *dukkha* is

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Paul Williams, with Anthony Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), p.43.

a central aspect of human life. While ‘suffering’ remains a popular definition of *dukkha*, we require a more thorough translation and definition of the term, to encompass its intended meaning. It would seem therefore that there is no exact translation of *dukkha*, with the popular English translation of suffering, failing to capture the depth or complexity of this concept. For as will become clear as this chapter develops *dukkha* encompasses a range of emotions and experiences such as experience of transience, awareness of impermanent nature of things, sorrow, frustration, anger, unsatisfactoriness and pain (to suggest but a few).<sup>234</sup>

### The Three Forms of Dukkha

By broadening the definition of *dukkha* to include notions of ‘unsatisfactoriness’ and ‘impermanence’ scholars, Analayo and Williams acknowledge an understanding of *dukkha* that encompasses all three forms of *dukkha* recognised within the Pāli Canon.<sup>235</sup> This is to say, within Buddhism, *dukkha* is recognised as having three unique and distinct forms of suffering that are characterised according to how this suffering impacts on the lives of all beings who exist within *saṃsāra*. These three forms are proclaimed by the Buddha, as recorded within the *Jambhukhādakaśaṃyutta* (SN 38:14) thus:

There are, friend, these three kinds of suffering: the suffering due to pain, the suffering due to formations, the suffering due to change. These are the three kinds

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<sup>234</sup> De Silva, *Tangles and Webs: Comparative Studies in Existentialism*, p.20.

<sup>235</sup> Often referred to as the *Tripiṭaka* or *Three Baskets*, the Pāli Canon is the authoritative collection of Buddhist scriptures according to the Theravāda tradition, comprising of the *Sutta piṭaka*, the *Vinaya piṭaka* and the *Abhidhamma piṭaka*.

of suffering. But, friend, is there a path, is there a way for the full understanding of these three kinds of suffering?<sup>236</sup>

According to this teaching, Buddhism has traditionally discerned three different forms of *dukkha* that manifest throughout the life of each individual. These different forms of *dukkha* can be summarised as follows: *dukkha-dukkha* (ordinary suffering), *vipariṇāma-dukkha* (suffering caused by impermanence and change), and *saṅkhārā-dukkha* (suffering caused through conditioned states). Throughout this chapter we shall see how each form of *dukkha* is employed to denote specific phenomena within the temporal world, which, in turn, give rise to feelings of dissatisfaction. Although I consider each form of suffering later, it may be of use to note here the basic topographies of each form. *Dukkha-dukkha* is used to convey those experiences that are most commonly cited as examples of suffering, including physical pain, illness, old age, bereavement, and so on. *Vipariṇāma-dukkha*, is associated with the dissatisfaction a person experiences through change, and, as such, is linked to the negative feelings that arise when circumstances that inspired joy change to inspire frustration. The third and final form, *saṅkhārā-dukkha*, is often regarded as more subtle and nuanced than the others, as it stems from the conditioned nature of all reality to signify the dissatisfaction one may feel when faced with the fluctuating and impermanent nature of all that exists within the cycle of *saṃsāra*.

The recognition of these latter three forms is vital when approaching Buddhism from a comparative perspective—not least, the philosophical or existential approach of Kierkegaard. For, as I’ve made clear in the literature review, those works that employ a narrow definition of *dukkha*—and which focus exclusively on its connotations of physical

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<sup>236</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1299.

and psychological suffering—frequently construct feeble comparisons between Buddhism and its comparative counterparts, which ultimately misrepresent Buddhism and the potential relationships it has with other disciplines. For instance, I have found that, when scholars attempt to explain relationships between Kierkegaardian ideas and these limited accounts of *dukkha*, the only parallels that can be drawn are founded on the mistaken belief that both philosophies are grounded in a psychological state that can be likened to states of anxiety which persist throughout a person’s life. However, as I shall discuss later in this chapter, there are more realistic and interesting parallels to identify and analyse between Kierkegaardian and Buddhist philosophy. In other words, once we’ve accepted that *dukkha* is presented within the Pāli texts as having three distinct manifestations, it is then possible to identify comprehensive parallels between Kierkegaard’s notion of *angest* and the final form of *dukkha*, *saṅkhārā-dukkha*. This possibility is due to the fact that both concepts are understood in their respective philosophies as significant elements in a person’s approach to the world, and in their capacity to realise their individuality, sense of self,<sup>237</sup> and their capacity to form relationships with the world. To this end, I shall now provide a brief overview of each kind of *dukkha*. This will enable me to establish the foundation upon which I shall build my comparison between *dukkha* and *angest*.

According to the scholar of Buddhism, Madura Venkata Ram Kumar Ratnam (2003), the first form of *dukkha*, *dukkha-dukkha*, is evoked by the initial lines of the *Saccasaṃyutta* (SN 56:11), which state:

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<sup>237</sup> It is interesting to note here, that this link between *saṅkhārā-dukkha* and the belief in one’s individuality also resonates with the work of Nietzsche, with both Nietzsche and Buddhist philosophy holding that the individual does not possess a permanent self but is rather made up of both physical and psychology factors. For more on this subject see Antoine Panaïoti (2013).

Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering [dukkha], aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering.<sup>238</sup>

By making the conceptual link between *dukkha-dukkha* and this passage, Ratnam interprets this form of *dukkha* as the various forms of physical or mental anguish that an individual encounters throughout their life. Hence, *dukkha-dukkha* is often defined as ‘ordinary suffering’, as it relates to those painful or distressing circumstances that are common to all sentient beings—such as, illness, death, sorrow, grief or physical pain.<sup>239</sup> Ratnam’s interpretation of *dukkha-dukkha* is supported by the works of psychologists Tirsch, Silberstein and Kolts (2016), who describe it as the “basic suffering of living”.<sup>240</sup> However, Tirsch, Silberstein and Kolts recognise that this type of *dukkha* is open to mistranslation, as it could suggest to some that “all of life is suffering”.<sup>241</sup> They therefore expound on the meaning of the concept, and in so doing, they adopt a stance similar to those I discussed in the previous section: by explaining that *dukkha-dukkha* does not signify that all life is suffering, but, rather, that “a certain amount of pain and difficulty comes with having a human life and a physical body<sup>242</sup> – it’s unavoidable – and coming to terms with it is important”.<sup>243</sup> Thus, *dukkha-dukkha* is often understood as ‘ordinary’ or ‘everyday’

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<sup>238</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1844.

<sup>239</sup> Madura Venkata Ram Kumar Ratnam, *Dukkha: Suffering in Early Buddhism*, Digumarti Bhaskara Rao (ed) (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2003), p.iv.

<sup>240</sup> Dennis Tirsch, Laura R. Silberstein & Russell L. Kolts, *Buddhist Psychology and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy: A Clinician’s Guide* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2016), p.26.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> This notion too is shared by leader of Tibetan Buddhism, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who in a lecture held in London on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2017, stated that experiencing everyday suffering is vital to the practice of Buddhism, for it is only through having to endure the difficulties of daily life that one becomes motivated to seek liberation from *dukkha*.

suffering, as it constitutes those experiences that are readily recognised as causing pain or distress to the individual.<sup>244</sup>

Owing to the broad range of experiences covered by the term *dukkha-dukkha*, it is safe to assume that it is this form of *dukkha* that Elwood and Smith have referred to when they conflate *dukkha* with Kierkegaard's *angest*. For, Elwood and Smith conflate the two on the basis of the psychological distress that they ascribe to both terms—with both scholars asserting that, due to the psychological distress involved in *dukkha*, Buddhism, in turn, must regard human existence as grounded in constant feelings of angst.<sup>245</sup> However, by presenting *dukkha* in this way, the works of both scholars are brought into question, because the term *dukkha*, as I have shown, implies so much more than mere psychological turmoil. Both scholars have attempted to extract one experience of the many implied by this term, and present this one experience as its primary facet, and subsequently, imply that feelings of anxiety are central to the meaning of *dukkha*. Whilst, anxiety is recognised as one of the many different psychological experiences included within the *first form* of *dukkha*, it is not valued as more significant than any other.<sup>246</sup> To present the term *dukkha* as synonymous with Kierkegaard's "existential anxiety",<sup>247</sup> is to exaggerate the primacy of this single psychological state. By misrepresenting *dukkha* in this way, Elwood and Smith, also misrepresent the relationship between *dukkha* and *angest*, leading to conclusions that provide no real insight into the possible relationship between the two philosophical systems. For *dukkha-dukkha* lacks the specific nature of Kierkegaard's *angest*, and constitutes a wider range of experiences. In other words, whilst anxiety concerning free will

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<sup>244</sup> Charles S. Prebish & Damien Keown, *Introducing Buddhism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.45.

<sup>245</sup> Elwood, *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes*, pp.222 – 224.

<sup>246</sup> Padmasiri De Silva, 'Buddhism and the tragic Sense of life', in *University of Ceylon Review* vol.25, no.1/2 (1967), p.67.

<sup>247</sup> Elwood, *Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Themes*, pp.222.

can be regarded as one aspect of the term, so could a host of other experiences, such as a fear of spiders, feeling frustrated when writing an essay, or tired when it is too hot.

Comparative analyses that focus on the relationship between *dukkha-dukkha* and *angest* tend, therefore, to be established on generalisations that distort Buddhist ideas.

The second form of suffering— *vipariṇāma-dukkha*—is associated with change. The Buddha teaches in the *Mahāsudassana Sutta* (DN 17: 2.16) that:

See, Ānanda, how all those conditioned states of the past have vanished and changed!  
Thus, Ānanda, conditioned states are impermanent, they are unstable, they can bring us no comfort, and such being the case, Ānanda, we should not rejoice in conditioned states, we should cease to take an interest in them, and be liberated from them.<sup>248</sup>

The Buddha, therefore, recognises that the temporal world is in a constant state of flux, and that, as a result, all worldly objects and conditions are impermanent, and subject to change and decay.<sup>249</sup> This notion is developed by the great fifth century Theravāda Buddhist commentator Buddhaghosa,<sup>250</sup> within his *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification), where he employs the term *vipariṇāma*, to mean, not simply ‘change’, but ‘change for the worse’.<sup>251</sup> I think Buddhaghosa’s interpretation is realistic, if we consider that the etymological root of *vipariṇāma-dukkha* is ‘craving’, and when one experiences something pleasurable, one

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<sup>248</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* by Maurice Walshe (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2012), p.290.

<sup>249</sup> Whilst, it is apparent that *vipariṇāma-dukkha* shares no significant parallels with Kierkegaard’s *angest*, it is important to highlight that this form of *dukkha* has significant points of conjecture with Kierkegaard’s understanding of human suffering. With both Kierkegaard’s notion of human suffering and *vipariṇāma-dukkha* purporting that humanities preoccupation with temporal desires, binds them to the material world, preventing them recognising their potential for liberation. This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

<sup>250</sup> Buddhaghosa interpretations of Buddhist doctrines have been recognised by Buddhist scholars Robert Buswell as constituting an authoritative understanding of Pāli scriptures. For more on this see Robert E. Buswell (2004).

<sup>251</sup> Ratnam, *Dukkha: Suffering in Early Buddhism*, p.53.



*craves* the continuation of that experience. Thus, given that all conditions within the cycle of *saṃsāra* are impermanent, one will inevitably have to face the loss of something to which one is attached. In this way, the transitory nature of the material world inevitably leads one to feelings of misery or disappointment, with the inability to satisfy all desires. This idea is also discussed in the work of Tibetan Buddhist practitioner and commentator Toni Bernhard (2011), who asserts that *vipariṇāma-dukkha* does not arise only when a pleasurable experience is in decline but can be present during the entire experience.<sup>252</sup> For Bernhard advocates that even in moments of exultation, a person is never truly satisfied, as there always remains an underlying apprehension that the experience will not last.

Textual support for these ideas is found in the *Tikanipāta* (AN 3:136.2), where the Buddha taught that “All conditioned phenomena are suffering”.<sup>253</sup> Ratnam comments on this passage to argue that, by deeming ‘all conditioned phenomena’ as a cause of *dukkha*, the Buddha was not trying to assert that all such phenomena possessed an *intrinsic quality* that conditioned the objects to cause *dukkha*,<sup>254</sup> but, on the contrary, it is an *individual’s attachment* towards the objects that lead *them* to cause feelings of dissatisfaction. From this, it is clear that, unlike *dukkha-dukkha* which frequently arises due to conditions beyond the individual’s control, *vipariṇāma-dukkha* is initiated by the individual’s desires for the material world. This means that, from a Buddhist perspective, it is possible to liberate oneself from *vipariṇāma-dukkha* by adhering to the teachings and practices of Buddhism.

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<sup>252</sup> Toni Bernhard, ‘What is Dukkha?’, 2011, <https://www.lionsroar.com/deep-dukkha-part-2-the-three-kinds-of-suffering/>, 15 February 2017.

<sup>253</sup> *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya* by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2012), p.364.

<sup>254</sup> Ratnam, *Dukkha: Suffering in Early Buddhism*, p.54.

Further support for this understanding is found in the *Mūlapariyāya Sutta* (MN 1.51), where the Buddha is accredited as saying:

Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu who is an arahant with taints destroyed, who has lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, destroyed the fetters of being, and is completely liberated through final knowledge, directly knows earth as earth. Having directly known earth as earth, he does not conceive [himself as] earth, he does not conceive [himself] in earth, he does not conceive [himself apart] from earth, he does not conceive earth to be 'mine/ he does not delight in earth. Why is that? Because he has fully understood it, I say.<sup>255</sup>

The relationship between *vipariṇāma-dukkha* and Kierkegaard's *angest* is complex, with there being two distinct ways to perceive it.

Firstly, it could be claimed that *vipariṇāma-dukkha* concentrates on the individual's relationship with temporal phenomena, by exploring how the individual can become consumed with desire (*taṇhā*) for objects, feelings, and experiences. This contrasts with Kierkegaard's *angest*, with the latter's focus on the extreme form of angst that a person suffers when they are unable to accept responsibility for their actions. *Vipariṇāma-dukkha*, therefore, concentrates on the individual's relationship to the temporal world, and is rooted in the individual's ignorance about the true nature of reality, while *angest* stems from an individual's inability to embrace their own freedom. However, recent developments in Kierkegaardian scholarship have opened up new, secondary points of relation between *angest* and *vipariṇāma-dukkha*, with, scholar, John Thomas (2012) noting that *angest* can

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<sup>255</sup> *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya: Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2009), pp.87-88.

arise in a person's awareness of the impermanence of personal relationships and social structures (an idea that will be examined later in this chapter). Moreover, whilst *vipariṇāma-dukkha* and *angest* may be judged as distinct from each another, it is clear that the Pāli teaching of *vipariṇāma-dukkha* shares similarities with Kierkegaard's understanding of human suffering. The relationship between *vipariṇāma-dukkha* and Kierkegaard's perception of human suffering will be explored throughout Chapter Four (see pages 161-202), where I analyse how Kierkegaard and Buddhism both regard the desire for worldly phenomena as a problem that binds humans to the world and prevents them from realising its objects lack meaningful substance. Despite the comparisons made by Elwood and Smith, conflating *dukkha* with Kierkegaardian *angest*, it is already becoming clear that their attempts are too simplistic and limited, with both scholars failing to note Kierkegaard's approach to suffering in his *Evangeliet om Lidelser* presents a more realistic and substantial point of reference.

It is important to note here, that scholar of Buddhism, Rewata Dhamma (1997), has maintained that both *dukkha-dukkha* and *vipariṇāma-dukkha* are easier for practitioners and commentators to comprehend, because they are rooted in common experiences that all beings will endure as a regular feature of their daily lives.<sup>256</sup> This assessment is significant, as its implications can be traced within existing works which have examined the relationship between Kierkegaard and Buddhism. Indeed, as Dhamma implies, scholars (particularly those who have approached the comparison from a theological perspective), have

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<sup>256</sup> Rewata Dhamma, *The First Discourse of the Buddha: Turning the Wheel of Dhamma* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997), p.57.

presenting Buddhism solely in terms of *dukkha-dukkha* or *vipariṇāma-dukkha*, which has had, as I have explained, an adverse impact on this area of study. For this reason, I intend to discuss the third form of *dukkha*—*saṅkhārā-dukkha*—in more detail than the previous two, with a specific focus on its relation to the Buddha’s teachings on the five aggregates. The relationship between *saṅkhārā-dukkha* and *angest* has been completely overlooked by Elwood and Smith, with both focusing on the psychological forms of suffering which are present within *dukkha-dukkha*, as opposed to the relation between *angest* and the illusion of possessing a permanent ontological self, which is linked to *saṅkhārā-dukkha*. As such, I shall now outline the final form of *dukkha*, before analysing the significant parallels that exist between it and *angest*.

As I have mentioned, the third form of *dukkha* is defined as ‘*dukkha* caused through conditioned states’. This is due to the fact that the term *saṅkhārā* is utilised in two distinct ways throughout the Pāli Canon. Firstly, the term is used as a collective noun to refer to all conditioned phenomena within the temporal world, thereby signifying all that is *not* ‘enlightened’. Failing to recognise the conditioned state of existence (ignorance of *saṅkhārā-dukkha*) can be an obstacle in one’s quest for awakening as it allows for the creation of false perceptions of reality. Accordingly, scholar of Theravāda Buddhism, Mathieu Boisvert (1997) maintains that the term is used to signify all phenomena that are characterised by the *tilakkhaṇa* (three marks of existence), namely *anicca* (impermanence), *anattā* (non-self) and *dukkha*.<sup>257</sup> Secondly, *saṅkhārā* is used to denote one of the five *kkhandhas*, which is to say, the *saṅkhārā-kkhandha* (loosely translated as ‘mental formations’). From this, it can be deduced that *saṅkhārā-dukkha* refers to the dissatisfaction

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<sup>257</sup> Ratnam, *Dukkha: Suffering in Early Buddhism*, p.54.

or suffering that can be attributed to the conditioned and dependently arisen<sup>258</sup> nature of all phenomena. For Buddhist philosophy contends that all phenomena are impermanent (*anicca*) and lack any permanent essence of being. Scholar of Buddhism Asanga Tilakaratne (2012) implies that this lack of essence, meaning, or purpose that is associated with *saṅkhārā-dukkha*, has a significant impact on how Buddhists understand the concept of 'being', or what constitutes the 'individual'.<sup>259</sup> This is because Buddhist philosophy approaches questions of ontology, through the doctrine of the five aggregates, contending that each person *should* be regarded as the sum of an ever-changing relationship between five groups or aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) of distinct physical and psychological forces. Buddhists believe that a person creates their sense of 'self' through the manner in which they misunderstand the complex relationships between these five groups, and this misunderstanding, in turn, becomes the basis of a person's most profound experiences of *saṅkhārā-dukkha*.

The first of the five aggregates, *rūpa*, is translated as the aggregate of matter or form. In early Buddhist literature, this aggregate is widely discussed with reference to the *cattāro mahābhūtāni* (Four Great Elements), and their derivatives (*upādāya-rūpa*), in light of the Buddha stating in *Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 28:5), for instance:

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<sup>258</sup> The doctrine of will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four (see pages 170-178). However, it is important to note here that all temporal phenomena are contingent on other factors for their existence, nothing within the realm of *saṃsāra* is responsible for its own existence. Dependant arising therefore means that all physical and mental states are dependent on other pre-existing states for their existence. For more on this see: Peter Harvey (1990).

<sup>259</sup> Asanga Tilakaratne, *Theravada Buddhism: The View of The Elders* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), p.40.

And what is the material form aggregate affected by clinging? It is the four great elements and the material form derived from the four great elements. And what are the four great elements?<sup>260</sup>

The *cattāro mahābhūtāni* consists of solidity, fluidity, heat and motion, alongside their derivatives (the five material sense organs, eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body),<sup>261</sup> and their corresponding objects in the material world (visible form, sound, scent, taste, and tangible objects).<sup>262</sup> Accordingly, the first aggregate is considered to signify all physical substances related to the body, both internal and external.<sup>263</sup> This means that it is through *rūpa* that a person gains their initial contact with the temporal world, as it is through their physical form that they first connect with their surroundings. However, it should be noted that whilst the first aggregate consists of all external sensory organs, it does not comprise one's ability to receive or engage with sensory data: these capabilities are explored through the remaining four aggregates.

The second aggregate, *vedanā*, refers to the aggregate of sensations. This aggregate is associated with sensations or feelings a person experiences when their physical or mental organs encounter a sensory object. The Buddha taught that there are six categories of sensory experience. The Buddha remarks in the *Khandhasamyutta* (SN 22:56):

And what, bhikkhus, is feeling? There are these six classes of feeling: feeling born of eye-contact, feeling born of ear-contact, feeling born of nose-contact, feeling born of

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<sup>260</sup> *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, p.278.

<sup>261</sup> It should be noted here, that while the first aggregate relates to the five material senses, namely those which respond to a physical organ e.g eyes, Buddhism does in fact recognise six sense organs, with the final organ being the mind. For within Buddhism the mind is believed to sense ideas or conceptions and experience the meditative realms.

<sup>262</sup> Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, pp.20-21.

<sup>263</sup> Mathieu Boisvert, *The Five Aggregates: Understanding Theravada Psychology and Soteriology* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995), pp.31-32.

tongue-contact, feeling born of body-contact, feeling born of mind-contact. This is called feeling.<sup>264</sup>

Mathieu Boisvert (1995) draws attention to the fact that *vedanā* relates to the six sense organs (*āyatana*) recognised within Buddhist philosophy—namely, the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.<sup>265</sup> As such, Boisvert thinks it necessary to emphasise that while *rūpa* is associated with the sensory organs, (due to them having been forged of matter), the relationship between the senses and *vedanā* is far more complex. This is because *vedanā* moves beyond the physical contact of the body and external stimuli, to explore the subjective response a person experiences as a result of this contact.<sup>266</sup>

The third aggregate, *saññā*, is widely defined as ‘perceptions’. Boisvert contends, however, that this term is misleading, and has led many commentators to treat the second and third aggregates as if they are interchangeable.<sup>267</sup> This problem is particularly evident in the work of Rahula, where he considers *saññā* almost exclusively in terms of *vedanā*, by drawing parallels between the two. As a consequence of this conceptual ‘merging’ of terms, Boisvert proposes that the term ‘recognition’ as a more appropriate translation of the third aggregate, owing to the fact that the English understanding of the term ‘recognition’ suggests the capacity of ‘conceptualisation’, which is a capacity that is central to this aggregate.<sup>268</sup> Indeed, although *saññā* is linked to the six sensory functions, its relationship to them is established through the *processing* of sensory information, to allow one, not simply

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<sup>264</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, pp.895-896.

<sup>265</sup> A further note should be made about the concept of the mind in Buddhism, for it is not understood in terms of spirit, as is sometimes the case in Christian philosophy. This is owing to the fact that Buddhism does not recognise the idea of spirit as opposed to matter. As such, the mind is perceived like any other sense organ, in that it can be controlled and developed.

<sup>266</sup> Boisvert, *The Five Aggregates: Understanding Theravada Psychology*, p.51.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.77-78.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

to sense external phenomena, but to recognise and categorise them. As such, it is through the third aggregate that a person is able to recognise the distinctive characteristics of external objects, and to distinguish between them on the basis of their physical characteristics: their shape, colour, size, and so on.

The fourth aggregate, *saṅkhārā*, is commonly defined as the aggregate of mental formations, which is to say, all types of mental imprints or conditions associated with a specific object or experience. Accordingly, the fourth aggregate is associated with any volition (*cetanā*) that leads a person to initiate action. Thus, it is this aggregate that is widely associated with the Buddhist understanding of *kamma*. This is owing to the Buddha's own definition of *kamma* in the *Chakkanipāta* (AN 6:63.5): "It is volition, bhikkhus, that I call *kamma*. For having willed, one acts by body, speech, or mind".<sup>269</sup> Consequently, *saṅkhārā* can be understood as the force or 'mental activity' that drives one's actions—be they good, bad or neutral. This interpretation differentiates the fourth aggregate from both *vedanā* and *saññā*, for while the fourth aggregate is still thought to be connected to the six Buddhist senses, unlike the previous aggregates, it is volitional and thus capable of producing *kammic* effects.

The final aggregate, *viññāṇa*, is the aggregate of consciousness, and is defined by Asanga Tilakaratne as "the mental element that arises based on the six sensory bases".<sup>270</sup> The fifth aggregate is thus a reaction experienced by a person when one of the six facilities (eye, nose, tongue, ear, body or mind) is engaged with one of the six analogous external phenomena (visible form, sound, taste, odour, palpable matter or thoughts). Hence, within

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<sup>269</sup> *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, p.963.

<sup>270</sup> Tilakaratne, *Theravada Buddhism: The View of The Elders*, p.40.



the Buddhist tradition, consciousness is understood as always directed towards a specific phenomenon; consciousness must always be ‘conscious’ of something. This is made clear in an example used by Rahula, who informs us that, in order for visual consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāṇa*) to arise, its basis (the eye) must become aware of a visible form. In this way, Rahula emphasises the fact that, should one of the six facilities not be alerted to a stimulus, consciousness will not arise. However, it should be noted that Buddhists do not associate the fifth aggregate with the capacity to discern the nature of the form of the stimuli, as this is linked to the third aggregate. Indeed, the final aggregate is understood exclusively in terms of awareness; it detects the presence of an object, but is unable to discern its physical characteristics, of its colour, shape, size, and so on.

As I shall discuss in more detail later in this chapter (see pages 133-141), it is *viññāṇa*, the final aggregate, that possesses the most intriguing relationship with Kierkegaard’s *angest*.

This is owing in part to the Buddhist perception that this aggregate creates a false perception of ‘I’ or ‘myself’, leading a person to develop the perception of a “permanently existing being that serves as the foundation of all self-centred desires”.<sup>271</sup> Asanga

Tilakaratne seems to suggest that it is through *viññāṇa* that a person begins to perceive themselves as separate or distinct from other temporal phenomena; and, furthermore, that this sense of individuality, gives rise to self-interest, where a person can become consumed by their own cravings. Thus, as I wish to suggest, both *viññāṇa* and Kierkegaardian *angest* are root causes for a person’s sense of individuality and unique being; both allow a person to perceive themselves as distinct from other beings, and objects within the world.

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

Both Rahula and Boisvert maintain that the false perception of 'self' is not created solely through the fifth aggregate, but rather, through the interrelation between all five aggregates. For, as I have discussed, central to the Buddhist understanding of human nature is the concept of *anattā*, which at its core teaches that there is no unchanging, permanent self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) or soul, or permanent substance that exists throughout the life of an individual. Rather, there exists a combination of these five aggregates, each of which are in a constant state of flux, and impermanent in nature. Moreover, these five aggregates are understood to be in a relationship of interdependence, reliant on one another for their proper functioning. For instance, a person needs to have a physical form (*rūpa*) if they are to employ those sensory organs that will give rise to *viññāṇa*. Equally, once a person becomes conscious of particular stimuli, it is only through the remaining three *khandhas*, *vedanā*, *saññā* and *saṅkhārā*, that he or she is able to respond to, recognise, or act in accordance with the stimuli. As such, it is clear that the interplay between aggregates is responsible for the false impression of developing or concrete sense of 'I'. Consequently, the notion of 'being' in Buddhism should be understood as a physio-psychological process, that lacks the inherent eternal quality that is central to many other Asian (and Western) religious and philosophical traditions. Indeed, as the Buddha states in *Saḷāyatanaṣaṃyutta* (SN 35:101):

Suppose, bhikkhus, people were to carry off the grass, sticks, branches, and foliage in this Jeta's Grove, or to burn them, or to do with them as they wish. Would you think: 'People are carrying us off, or burning us, or doing with us as they wish?' "No, venerable sir. For what reason? Because, venerable sir, that is neither our self nor what belongs to our self." "So too, bhikkhus, the eye is not yours ... Whatever feeling

arises with mind-contact as condition . . . that too is not yours: abandon it. When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness.<sup>272</sup>

*Saṅkhārā-dukkha* can, therefore, be seen as arising from one's ontological condition. All sentient beings can be understood as *suññatā* (empty/void of self), and *dukkha* is thus an inherent condition of what it is to be human.<sup>273</sup> Humanity, like all phenomena within the temporal world, is therefore understood as dependent in its very being on, and part and parcel of, a world “compounded of unstable and unreliable conditions, a world in which pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering are in all sorts of ways bound up together”.<sup>274</sup> Each individual, as with the temporal world, is in a constant state of flux; there is no permanent and unchanging self. This important notion of the self is clearly reflected in the Buddha's teachings; in the *Sattakanipāta* (AN 7:74.4) where he states:

Just as a river flowing down from a mountain, going a long distance, with a swift current, carrying along much flotsam, will not stand still for a moment, an instant, a second, but will rush on, swirl, and flow forward, so too, brahmins, human life is like a mountain stream. It is limited... for none who are born can escape death.<sup>275</sup>

Consequently, the works of Rahula and Boisvert establish interesting points of enquiry that lead to a potentially creative and significant comparison between Kierkegaardian and Buddhist philosophy. For, as I have shown, on the one hand, it is possible to explore the relationship between the five aggregates in their entirety as creating a sense of individuality and thus possessing philosophical similarities with Kierkegaard's notion of *angest*. However,

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<sup>272</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1182.

<sup>273</sup> Andreas Anangguru Yewangoe, *Theologia Crucis in Asia: Asian Christian Views on Suffering in the Face of Overwhelming Poverty and Multifaceted Religiosity in Asia* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), pp.168-170.

<sup>274</sup> Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.62.

<sup>275</sup> *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1096.

equally the clear focus on the impermanence of all five aggregates highlights a significant tension between these two philosophical systems, for Kierkegaard's work is engrained in the Christian tradition—with his notion of the Self-possessing an infinite quality that enables one to relate to the divine—whilst, within Buddhist traditions, this conception of an eternal Self is rejected, as the aggregates are understood as both impermanent and dependent. As such, the fleeting comparisons between *dukkha* and *angest* that I discussed earlier are relatively weak and inconsequential, for they have completely neglected the complexity of the third form of *dukkha*, ignoring both the significant parallels and tensions it raises between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism. It is my contention, therefore, that commentators have been too eager to conflate these philosophical systems, finding them all too similar. Moreover, as I shall argue, there are more significant and accurate parallels between the two, and alongside these, there remain substantial differences. The rest of this chapter shall consider these in detail.

### The Relationship Between Angest and Dukkha

As I have argued throughout the preceding chapters, scholars Lynn De Silva, Dougless Elwood and Huston Smith that have attempted to explore how the Buddhist teachings of *dukkha* parallel Kierkegaard's notion of *angest*, and, moreover, *existential angst* more generally. I have drawn attention to the fact that many of these publications are too limited in their scope, by defining either *dukkha* or *angest* too narrowly, and thereby establishing points of parallel that are insubstantial and inaccurate. However, despite the disappointing

works that seek to elucidate a direct comparison between Buddhism and Kierkegaard,<sup>276</sup> or between Buddhism and existentialism more generally, there remain a small number of publications<sup>277</sup> within the field of Buddhist psychology that have generated some intriguing—and potentially useful—areas of comparison. These comparisons tend to be subtle, comprising just a few sentences or short paragraphs of discussion—and yet, if they were subjected to further analysis, they could help to establish a solid foundation for the exploration of more meaningful comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism.

Of particular significance in this context is the work of Padmasri De Silva (2000), a scholar of Buddhism, who specialises in the philosophy and psychology of the Theravāda tradition. De Silva argues that anxiety, when approached from an existential perspective, shares a common focus with the Buddhist concept of *dukkha*. This common focus is the impermanent nature of existence —the transitory nature of material objects, and, more significantly, of life itself.<sup>278</sup> Unlike the previous scholarly works —which I have heavily criticised for this failure—De Silva provides a comprehensive definition of *dukkha* that manages to explore the numerous ways this concept is employed and approached with Buddhist philosophy. For instance, when approaching the topic of *dukkha* and existential therapy, De Silva defines *dukkha* as “the basic dissonance, emptiness and boredom which emerge out of a life of pure pleasure seeking”.<sup>279</sup> From this definition we can appreciate that De Silva is not equating *dukkha* with mere physical or psychological pain, but is making

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<sup>276</sup> Within this category I am including all works that deal directly with the supposed comparisons that exist between Buddhism and Kierkegaard’s existential writings and also those comparisons that exist between Buddhism and his theological works.

<sup>277</sup> Such publications include: De Silva (2000); Sheikh & Sheikh (1996) and Hough (2015).

<sup>278</sup> Padmasiri De Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), p.110.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

shrewd reference to both *vipariṇāma-dukkha* and *saṅkhārā-dukkha*, in his suggestion that the impermanent and conditioned nature of all objects and beings leads people to feel dissatisfied with their existence. Thus, for De Silva, *dukkha* and existential anxiety are similarly concerned with the reality of life<sup>280</sup>. In this respect, existentialism and Buddhism contrast significantly from other philosophical and religious traditions as they do not attempt to distance a person from the chaos and torment of life, but, on the contrary, seek to strengthen their resolve to it, by helping their adherents to recognise this important aspect of life.

De Silva frequently eludes to existentialism throughout his introduction to Buddhist psychology<sup>281</sup>, however, it is unfortunate that his evaluation of the relationship between *dukkha* and existential angst makes only passing reference to the work of Kierkegaard (he simply states in the baldest of terms that there are “significant points of convergence between the Buddha and Kierkegaard”<sup>282</sup>). Whilst his reference to Kierkegaard indicates that De Silva recognises intriguing parallels between Buddhism and Kierkegaardian philosophy, in terms of the ego, and its role in initiating experiences of *angest* or anxiety, his work fails to provide a detailed analysis of these parallels which will be explored throughout the rest of this chapter.

De Silva maintains that, from a Buddhist perspective, anxiety should be perceived as an expression of *dukkha* that arises from a person’s “deep-rooted attachment to the ego”.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid, pp.104-112.

<sup>281</sup> For instance, throughout the fifth chapter of his *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, De Silva consistently draws on existential philosophy in order to explore points of parallel between Buddhist psychology and Western philosophy. He has also explored these ideas in more detail throughout his 1977 publication *Tangles and Webs: Comparative Studies in Existentialism, Psychoanalysis and Buddhism*.

<sup>282</sup> De Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, p.110.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

This point of view is supported by the Buddha's discourse within the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* (MN 22:23-24). In this discourse the Buddha proclaims that anxiety (translated here from the Pāli *paritissanā*<sup>284</sup>) stems from a person's inability to comprehend that there is no permanent self—an inability that leads him or her to retain a self-belief in the existence of an 'I' or 'myself'. Thus, the Buddha states:

When someone who does not have the view that the world and the soul are the same, and that after death he will be permanent, enduring, eternal, immutable and that he will exist like that for ever hears the Buddha's teaching about the abandonment and elimination of theories, opinions and attachment to them, the teaching that aims at the suppression of clinging obsessive attachments, the relinquishing of possessions, the end of craving, the cultivation of dispassion and the extinction of greed, hatred and delusion – he does not think, 'I shall be annihilated. I shall be destroyed. I shall no longer exist.' He is not distressed and confused. He is not anxious about something that does not exist.<sup>285</sup>

De Silva infers from this passage that a belief in an 'I' gives rise to a superficial sense of security and deludes a person into believing that they possess a permanent identity that extends beyond the temporal world. This view point is also found in the work of Christopher Bartley (2015), a scholar of Asian religions, who suggests that by "identifying anything finite and transient, such as a stream of embodied experiences, as persisting personal identity (an obstacle to enlightenment called 'sat-kaya-drsti') [will] bound to lead to unhappiness and

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<sup>284</sup>Padmasiri De Silva, 'The Psychology of Emotions in Buddhist Perspective', (1976), [https://www.bps.lk/olib/wh/wh237\\_de-Silva\\_Psychology-of-Emotions-in-Buddhist-Perspective.html](https://www.bps.lk/olib/wh/wh237_de-Silva_Psychology-of-Emotions-in-Buddhist-Perspective.html), 10 June 2017.

<sup>285</sup> *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, p.231.

anxiety”.<sup>286</sup> Thus, both De Silva and Bartley conclude that anxiety arises out of an attachment to one's personal identity—from a personal longing for self-continuation and self-preservation. Both scholars therefore associate feelings of anxiety with *saṅkhārā-dukkha*, by suggesting that anxiety arises through a person's inability to recognise that their existence is conditioned, due to their deluded belief that they possess a permanent ontological status. We shall see that this preoccupation with the concepts of 'I' and 'mine' opens up a meaningful Intriguing comparison between Kierkegaard's existentialism and *saṅkhārā-dukkha*, as it suggests that both *angest* and *dukkha* stem from one's sense of self, which, in turn, leads one to feel anxious about the impact one's actions may have on one's future status. In this way, anxiety is rooted in both systems of thought within self-consciousness, which gives rise to egotism and a problematic self-centredness.

Interestingly, De Silva argues that egotism can give rise to anxiety in three distinct ways. These ways are significant as they demonstrate how the three forms of *dukkha*—with specific reference to *saṅkhārā-dukkha*—initiate feelings of anxiety that impact on the individual's sense of self and their relation to the material world. In his discussion of these three manifestations of anxiety, De Silva reveals how the delusion of a permanent self leads a person to become self-absorbed and constrained by their desire to further their own existence—desires that lead, in turn, to anguish in the fear that their goals may not be realised.

### The First Manifestation of Anxiety

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<sup>286</sup> Christopher Bartley, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy: Hindu and Buddhist Ideas from Original Sources* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p.37.



Anxiety manifests itself in the relationship between a person and their misunderstanding of the world (and moreover their role within it). In this respect, anxiety arises out of a gulf between a person's comprehension and the true temporal nature of the cosmos.<sup>287</sup> I will explain this particular aspect of anxiety in Chapter Four (see pages 161-211), where I shall examine how one's perception of the material world can distract one from conforming to the *dhamma* and striving for enlightenment. We can interpret this, the first manifestation of anxiety according to De Silva, as akin to Kierkegaard's understanding of human *suffering* in contradistinction to human *anxiety*. This is owing to the fact that Kierkegaard barely considers this topic within *Begrebet Angest* and opts instead to focus on such themes as the nature of freedom and responsibility. It is due to his silence on the subject that I will refrain from discussing the first manifestation of anxiety within this chapter, choosing instead to examine it later, in the more appropriate context (see pages 161-211): in relation to Kierkegaard's *Evangeliet om Lidelser*.

### The Second Manifestation of Anxiety

De Silva's proposed second manifestation of anxiety is rooted in the idea of a person's experience of other people. This is similar in structure to the first manifestation in so far as a person can experience anxiety due to their inability to recognise the impermanent nature of personal relationships and sociological structures. The work of psychologists Baljinder Sahdra and Phillip Shaver (2013) highlight this situation in light of personal relations, where they claim that, human relationships, like material objects, are regarded by Buddhists as

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<sup>287</sup> De Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, p.93.

subject to *anicca*.<sup>288</sup> This position is due to the fact that, according to Buddhism, people are not static beings; they are in a constant state of transformation, due in part to the dynamic relationship that underpins the five aggregates. Accordingly, Sahdra and Shaver acknowledge that the continual physical and psychological changes that impact upon a person, will cause their relationships with others to change. This exemplified, for instance, with such cases as two strangers who establish a meaningful relationship out of a fleeting meeting on a bus or train; or, for instance, the sudden separation of a couple in a committed relationship. As such, Buddhists maintain that human relationships are always open to change, with even the strongest of personal bonds becoming susceptible to turmoil and sadness. De Silva subsequently suggests that anxiety is an inevitable result of the impermanent nature of personal relationships, as a person will only achieve—and can become preoccupied with the fact that they can only achieve—temporary pleasure in their relationships with others.<sup>289</sup> Thus, the awareness of the possibility of the loss of this pleasure inevitably leads, he claims, to feelings of anxious apprehension.

The second manifestation of anxiety is also indicative of the kind of anxiety that arises in light of the impermanence of society and its social structures that impact on a person throughout their life—thereby linking this form of anxiety to *vipariṇāma-dukkha*.<sup>290</sup> Specifically, it can be seen in cases where a person regards society and its social orders as permanent structures with inherent meaning, imparting to them an objective sense of

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<sup>288</sup> Baljinder K. Sahdra & Phillip R. Shave, 'Comparing Attachment Theory and Buddhist Psychology', in *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* vol.23, no.4 (2013), pp.282-293.

<sup>289</sup> Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa Ñāḍasampanno, *Forest Dhamma: A Selection of Talks on Buddhist Practice*, Venerable Ācariya Paññāvaḍḍho (trans) (Udon Thani: Forest Dhamma Publications, 1973), pp.37-40.

<sup>290</sup> Ken Jones, 'Buddhism and Social Action: an Exploration', (1981), <http://enlight.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-MISC/misc140400.pdf>, 15 May 2017.

purpose. This can lead people to advocate a range of ideologies or to conform to social norms in order to achieve a sense of belonging, purpose, and meaning.

According to Barbara A. Holdrege (1996), who specialises in the comparative history of religion, the Buddha spurned the social institutions of the Vedic society to which he once belonged, and subsequently perceived the *varṇa system*, and its emphasis on preservation of physical purity, as a system that establishes a person's attachment to the material world and ensures their rebirth within the cycle of *saṃsāra*.<sup>291</sup> The Buddha's rejection of such systems is particularly clear within the *Assalāyana Sutta* (MN 93:18), where he questions the validity of an inherited social system: "But, sirs, do you know if your mother's mothers back to the seventh generation went only with brahmins and never with non-brahmins?"<sup>292</sup>

The Buddha contends that such systems and social norms lack the stringent moral foundations that they themselves seek to enforce within society. As such, Buddhist philosophy tends to recognise social systems in similar manner to material objects: as products of *paṭītyasamuttpāda* (dependent origination), meaning they are void of inherent existence and subject to *anicca*.

Social structures therefore give rise to anxiety in two principal ways. Initially, a person can feel anxiety if they are unable to appropriate themselves within the current social systems—in such a situation, a person can feel anxious and lost as to how to ensure their own success within their communities, and so forth. Additionally, anxiety can also arise due to the impermanent nature of social structures. Given they, as with all phenomena, are subject to *anicca*, and are thus subject to decay and decline, they can imbue a great sense of

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<sup>291</sup> Barbara A. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p.406.

<sup>292</sup> *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, p.769.

vulnerability to a person who otherwise craves the security of permanence, in a desperate quest for personal meaning. In this way, this second form of anxiety can be construed as one linked to a person's inability to embrace their own freedom, leading to them to embrace, instead, social codes as a means of absconding from the responsibility associated with freedom and choice.<sup>293</sup>

It should be noted here that Padmasiri De Silva's second form of anxiety is rooted in *vipariṇāma-dukkha* due to its concerns with the transient nature of both personal relationships and sociological structures. This means that this form of anxiety arises from a person's inability to accept the impermanent nature of social experience. For, as the Buddha taught in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN 16:6.10): "Impermanent are compounded things, prone to rise and fall, Having risen, they're destroyed, their passing truest bliss".<sup>294</sup> This is to say, that feelings of anxiety are not inevitable, and can in fact be overcome through the Buddha's teachings. I revisit this important point later, both within this chapter and Chapter Four (see pages 219-240), as it holds a significant place within the comparison between Kierkegaardian philosophy and the teachings of the Pāli texts, revealing a major point of contention between the two. We shall see there that while Buddhism offers a means of escaping anxiety, Kierkegaard maintains that anxiety is an inescapable aspect of human nature.

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<sup>293</sup> It is this form of anxiety which has been likened by scholars such as Steven W. Laycock (1994)<sup>293</sup> and Phra Medhidhammaporn (1995) to draw comparisons between Buddhism and the Sartian concept of *mauvaise foi* (Bad Faith). Whilst not directly linked to Kierkegaard's philosophy, *mauvaise foi* remains one of the central concepts within wider existential philosophy, constituting the phenomena whereby individuals feel unable to harness their own freedom. Burdened by the idea that they are responsible for the outcomes of the actions and pressured by social factors, the individual rejects their own freedom, adopting false values in order to conform to sociological expectation. *Mauvaise foi* is the essence of an inauthentic existence, being closely linked to self-deception. For more on this see Steven W. Laycock (1994).

<sup>294</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, p.271.

Despite the different approaches to anxiety that exist within Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, it is interesting to note that De Silva's second manifestation of anxiety exposes new points of comparison between the two traditions. Thus, although Kierkegaard himself does not directly discuss how *angest* is caused by one's personal relationships or attitudes towards society, the Kierkegaardian scholar John Thomas (2012), has suggested that Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angest* [*The Concept of Anxiety*] should be understood in light of his criticisms of Danish society and the established Church. Throughout *The Legacy of Kierkegaard*, Thomas insinuates that, for Kierkegaard, the influx of Biblical scholarship in 19<sup>th</sup> century Denmark was an attack on both individualism and faith.<sup>295</sup> According to Thomas, Kierkegaard regarded Biblical scholarship as the means by which the established Church sought to objectify Christianity, creating through the doctrine of original sin, for instance, a model of human nature that was rigid and stultified by its compulsion to sin, and that sin was an inherited disorder that could only be alleviated through the grace of a forgiving God. This argument finds support in the work of Kierkegaardian scholar Lee Barrett (1985), who maintains that Kierkegaard rejects the Church's stance on original sin on the basis that it is an innate and inherited condition, which "cannot involve individual responsibility".<sup>296</sup> As a consequence of this, Christopher Barnett (2016) writes, the Church—in Kierkegaard's eyes—was able to establish itself as the mediator between humanity and the divine, causing the individual to abandon their own values and adhere instead to Church dogma, if, that is, they seek absolution from their sinful nature.<sup>297</sup> We shall see that this approach to Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angest* establishes an important parallel to Pāli texts

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<sup>295</sup> John Heywood Thomas, *The Legacy of Kierkegaard* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), pp.109-110.

<sup>296</sup> Lee Barrett, 'Kierkegaard's "Anxiety" and the Augustinian Doctrine of Original Sin', in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety*, Robert L. Perkins (ed) (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), p.38.

<sup>297</sup> Christopher B. Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p.66.

explored previously within this section of my thesis, in so far as it highlights Kierkegaard's belief that the established Church disregards the role of the individual in the quest for salvation, by emphasising, instead, the important role of the Church as a facilitator between humans and God. Kierkegaard's criticisms of the established Church resonate with the Buddha's rejection of the *varṇa* system, for the Buddha, like Kierkegaard, valued the role of the individual in the path to enlightenment.<sup>298</sup>

Kierkegaard refutes this dogmatic model of human nature, because it denies a person both their freedom and responsibility for their actions, for it enables a person to deny culpability for their actions on the basis that they can be blamed instead on inherited sin. Kierkegaard considers this a form of blasphemy, likening it to accusing God of blame for his role in providing Adam with choice. Thus, Kierkegaard states in *Begrebet Angest*: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'".<sup>299</sup> Kierkegaard's major concern here is with the Church's insistence on the inherited nature of sin, for it removes the ethical challenges that are central to life. In other words, the problem lies in the Church failing to emphasise the imitation of Christ as the essential act, and, thus, to advocate the denial of worldly pleasures, as Christ did. In failing to do this, the Church inadvertently places material pleasures above one's moral disposition to deal with them, for a person is presented as incapable of escaping their inherited sinfulness, and as inevitably falling victim to its all-too-human pleasures. According to Kierkegaard, this is a misrepresentation of the nature of

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<sup>298</sup>A point that is highlighted by scholar of Buddhism, Richard H. Jones (1979), the Buddha rejected all models where liberation from the temporal world is achieved through societal progress, thereby maintaining that enlightenment "enlightenment is an only [to] be accomplished on an individual basis". (Richard H. Jones, 'Theravāda Buddhism and Morality', in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* vol.47, no.3 (1979), p.357.) Jones' claims clearly echo the Buddha's own teachings within *The Dhammapadam* (165) which instruct that "The Pure and the impure come from oneself: no man can purify another (*The Dhammapadam: The Path of Perfection: translated from the Pāli by Juan Mascaro* (London: Penguin Classics, 1973), p.59.)

<sup>299</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.58.

Christianity; he writes: “This falsification is really forgery brought about over the centuries, whereby Christianity has gradually become just the opposite of what it is in the New Testament”.<sup>300</sup> In this way, Kierkegaard maintains that the Church places guilt above ethical conduct; which is to say that although it preaches the need for guilt in response to one’s trespasses, it nevertheless maintains that a person cannot help but commit them. Moreover, the Church, Kierkegaard argues, claims to aid us in our absolution of sins by providing us with rituals that are designed to bridge the gulf between God and humanity, to enable us to experience the divine despite our flawed nature. Kierkegaard therefore maintains that “Christianity was abolished in Christendom—by leniency. Without authority, Christianity creeps around in Christendom in worn-out decrepit clothes”.<sup>301</sup> Theologian, Owen C. Thomas (2012), contends that Kierkegaard rejected the Church because it was seen by Kierkegaard to negate the significance of personal intimacy and inwardness in the creation of a meaningful relationship with God.<sup>302</sup> For inwardness, to Kierkegaard, is the ability of a person to recognise themselves as a unique individual, and to comprehend their life as a process of becoming, where they are the agents who govern their own decisions. Without this kind of recognition of one’s subjective nature, Kierkegaard asserts that one cannot have a meaningful relationship with God, for a person has to *choose* to give themselves to the infinite. Faith, Kierkegaard proclaims, is “held fast *to the objective uncertainty with all the passion of inwardness*”.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, ‘This Must Be Said; So Let It Be Said’, in *The Moment and Late Writings*, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (eds and trans) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p.74.

<sup>301</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (eds & trans) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp.227–228.

<sup>302</sup> Owen C. Thomas, ‘Kierkegaard’s Attack upon “Christendom” and the Episcopal Church’, in *Anglican Theological Review* vol.94, no.1 (2012), pp.59-78.

<sup>303</sup> Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, p.176.

The established Church is therefore condemned by Kierkegaard as an obstacle that prevents a person from meaningful relationship with God, because the Church seeks to reduce religion to objective and communal terms, thereby ignoring the human need for a *personal* relationship with God, and eradicating the essential difficulties of true faith by discouraging personal sacrifice and complete submission.<sup>304</sup> As Kierkegaard states: “the difficult of becoming it [a Christian] now is of having, by one’s own self-activity, to transform an initial being-a-Christian [baptism in infancy] into a possibility, in order truly to become a Christian”.<sup>305</sup> In this way, the Church attempts to eradicate *angest* by preventing a person from realising their unique individuality. The Church focuses instead on the inherently flawed and sinful nature of humanity, and in so doing, it obscures the infinite aspect of a person’s character, and, likewise, obscures their capacity for freedom and responsibility. This means that followers of the Church fail to embrace their independence and responsibility to determine their own future, by ignorantly and blindly following stringent dogmas that provide reductive structures and meaning to their lives.<sup>306</sup>

If we analyse Kierkegaard’s criticism of the established Church in light of De Silva’s second manifestation of anxiety, it is clear that there are points of correlation, emerging from both Kierkegaard’s and the Buddha’s disapproval of the established religious systems of their time. While this correlation is not in itself focused explicitly on the nature of anxiety, as it is understood in both systems, it does bring to light the equal disdain that Kierkegaard and the Buddha had for the organised theological dogmas and systems of their time, and, in particular, how these infiltrate society in such a way as to encourage people to attach

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<sup>304</sup> Thomas, ‘Kierkegaard’s Attack upon “Christendom” and the Episcopal Church’, pp.59-78.

<sup>305</sup> Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, p.306.

<sup>306</sup> Avi Sagi, ‘The Suspension of the Ethical and the Religious Meaning of Ethics in Kierkegaard’s Thought’, in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* vol.32, no.2 (1992), p.97.



themselves to temporal values that cost them their freedom to further themselves on the path to liberation. Thus, Kierkegaard contends that the established Church, through its doctrine of original sin, discourages its followers to imitate the example of Christ, and, consequently, inadvertently encourages them to partake in the pleasures of the temporal world (instead, that is, of sacrificing the profane pleasures of their earthly existence as Christ taught in the Gospel of Mark). Equally, Buddhist theorist Richard Gombrich (2012) suggests that the Buddha criticised the *varṇa system* in its attempts to bind individuals to the cycle of *saṃsāra*, for the intrinsic system, with its purity laws, ensured that a person's focus remained on temporal issues, with high caste practitioners craving the accolades assigned to their status.<sup>307</sup> Thus, from the perspective of the Buddha and Kierkegaard, religious institutions limit a person from achieving their potential, by establishing a social system that dictates purpose, and simply dictates to people the fact that their essential human nature is divinely inspired, and, as such, they should conform to the traditions of the established religion. This means that both the Buddha and Kierkegaard criticised institutionalised religion for defining the place of each individual, determining, in the case of Vedic Hinduism, each person's role within society, and within Christianity, how they were to approach God.

In this reading, the social systems that arise from the organised Christian Church and Vedic Hinduism alleviate anxiety or *angest* by encouraging the individual to deny their freedom.<sup>308</sup> As both Buddhism and Kierkegaard seem to suggest that if a person accepts the sociological function of the established religion, they delude themselves into believing that their life has

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<sup>307</sup> Richard F. Gombrich, *Buddhist Precept & Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p.367.

<sup>308</sup> Again, this can be seen as similar to the wider existential conception of bad faith, for more on this see Laycock (1994).

intrinsic structure and that they have no choice or responsibility but to follow the commands of the organised religion. By escaping anxiety or *angest* in this way, a person prevents themselves from gaining a true understanding of the nature of reality, and thereby prevents themselves from entering the final goal of their respective belief systems, namely relation with God or enlightenment.

### The Third Manifestation of Anxiety

According to De Silva, the third form of anxiety recognised within Pāli Canon stems from the “inability to grasp the basic truth of egolessness”.<sup>309</sup> It is grounded in the human tendency to perceive oneself as a “solid entity” who comprises the various events and experiences that constitute one’s life.<sup>310</sup> This suggests that the development of a sense of ‘I’, and of ‘mine’ increases one’s vulnerability to becoming wholly self-interested, and, by the same token, causing one to become attached to one’s desires to detrimental repercussions. De Silva claims that this, the final, form of anxiety, stems from a fixation on the part of the individual, on self-preservation or personal accomplishment, and individual successes in temporal pursuits—a preoccupation that stands in direct contrast with the personal striving for enlightenment. The third form of anxiety is, therefore, primarily concerned with one’s position within the temporal world, arising in response to specific situations or objects (such as, for example, whether one has passed an exam, or whether a broken phone can be repaired). This form of anxiety is, thus, a product of ego-centered desire, born from an inability to recognise that there is no permanent ontological self.

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<sup>309</sup>De Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, p.49.

<sup>310</sup> Terry Clifford, *Tibetan Buddhist Medicine and Psychiatry: The Diamond Healing* (Delhi: Shri Jainendra Press, 2001), p.17.

In this way, De Silva's third form of anxiety is rooted in the final form of suffering—*saṅkhārā-dukkha*. This is because the anxiety arises due to a person's inability to accept the conditioned nature of their existence. In a similar way to the way in which *saṅkhārā-dukkha* is thought to underpin all other forms of *dukkha* due to its association with the establishment of one's sense of self, De Silva's third model of anxiety can also be regarded as triggering all previous forms of anxiety. This is because the final form of anxiety is associated with the individual's deluded sense of self and the egotism to which this leads.<sup>311</sup> This, in turn, gives rise to interesting parallels with Kierkegaard's *angest* owing to the fact that both systems of thought recognise that an established sense of self leads a person to feel apprehensive about their future. Correspondingly, both Kierkegaard's existentialism and Pāli texts maintain that anxiety or *angest* is coupled with an egotism that a person to value their place in the temporal world, distracting them from recognising their possibility for self-overcoming.<sup>312</sup>

Although De Silva very briefly outlines the third form of anxiety, it is clear that his understanding of it is grounded in the Buddha's teaching of the five aggregates—a teaching that concerns itself with the erroneous belief in a permanent identity.<sup>313</sup> This notion is summarised by the Pāli Scholar Gunapala Piyasena Malalasekera (1964), as follows:

The five aggregates together constitute what is called the 'I' or 'personality' or the 'individual'. The aggregates are not parts or pieces of the individual but phases or forms of development, something like the shape, color, and smell of a flower. Even

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<sup>311</sup> Paul O. Ingram, *The Process of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2009), p.92.

<sup>312</sup> By self-overcoming I mean the process by where one learns to master their own mind suppressing egotistic thoughts and desires in order that they can perceive the true nature of reality.

<sup>313</sup> This belief is in direct contrast with the Buddhist teaching of *anattā*, which rejects the existence of an underlying permanent substance comparable to the Christian soul, instead presenting human existence as compound of five constantly changing aggregates.

the sense organs and the organs of the body are likewise really forms of development or manifestations, since they all originate from a common source. There is no 'stuff' or substratum as such but only manifestations, energies, activities, processes. In Buddhist thought to speak of matter as apart from energy would be like speaking of one sheet of paper imagined by itself.<sup>314</sup>

Within the ontological teachings of the Pāli texts, every person is understood as a composition of non-permanent aggregates in continual flux. This is a continuity of forms (*santāna*) leads to the experience of self-grasping, and, from there, to the deluded experience of perceiving oneself as a unified being with past, present and future experiences. This means that according to the Pāli texts, identifying with one's past experiences or holding aspirations for one's future is often regarded as a delusion. Likewise, the aggregates, like all phenomena, are impermanent and insubstantial, so that, within a person's life numerous sets of aggregates will arise and dissipate, and temporarily unite in fleeting conjunctions before becoming replaced by the next set of aggregates. The Pāli texts recognises, therefore, that all beings are in a continuous state of change and transformation, with the psycho-physical groupings that self-experience and comprehension of the world, also in constant flux.<sup>315</sup>

As I have discussed throughout this chapter, numerous scholars have maintained that tendency to understand oneself as a solid eternity is caused by an inability, on the part of an

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<sup>314</sup> G. P. Malalasekera, 'The Status of the Individual in Theravāda Buddhism', in *Philosophy East and West* vol.14, no.2 (1964), p.147.

<sup>315</sup> Malalasekera likens this state of affairs to a 'combustion' that arises when specific factors (such as heat, oxygen, and fuel) come together in a specific moment in time see Malalasekera (1964). Similarly, scholar of Tibetan Buddhism, Terry Clifford (2001) maintains that all Buddhist schools regard life as a "changing expression of [an] existential interaction" –and, in so doing, he also implies that one's identity, and—moreover—one's individual relationship with the world is ephemeral; see Terry Clifford (2001).

individual, to comprehend the complex relationship that underpins the five aggregates. In particular, we find an array of scholars—including Malalasekra, Tilakaratne, and specifically, Phra Medhidhammaporn (1995)—have proposed that it is the *final* aggregate, *viññāṇa*, that is most fundamental in causing a person (*puggala*) to develop a false conception of ‘I’. Malalasekra, Tilakaratne, and Medhidhammaporn each maintain that it is through *viññāṇa* that a person first becomes self-conscious, and aware of themselves as an *object* within the temporal world, and, from this position, begins to reflect upon themselves, questioning their nature, existence, and purpose.<sup>316</sup> Moreover, it is the acquisition of self-consciousness that leads one to consider the existence of ‘the other’ as an existence that is external and distinct to them. The fifth aggregate therefore enables a person to perceive themselves as separate to others and gives rise to their sense of individualism. This is made clear in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* (MN 18:16) where it states:

What one perceives, that one thinks about. What one thinks about, that one mentally proliferates. With what one has mentally proliferated as the source, perceptions and notions tinged by mental proliferation beset a man with respect to past, future, and present forms cognizable.<sup>317</sup>

From this, it can be deduced that the unenlightened being (*puthujjana*), who retains the belief in a permanent ontological self, differentiates (*papañceti*) themselves from other worldly phenomena, by assigning different meanings and functions to these things and ascribing them with a purpose. In this way, individuality is established through a recognition of being different to other worldly objects, and in the process of its establishment, specific

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<sup>316</sup> Phra Medhidhammaporn, *Satre’s Existentialism and Early Buddhism: A Comparative Study of Selflessness Theories* (Bangkok: Buddhaddhamma Foundation, 1995), pp.129-130.

<sup>317</sup> *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, p.203.

objects that are identified as ‘other’ are singled out as having special significance. For instance, I can ascribe particular meanings to the temporal objects I perceive, such as the chair on the floor in front of me, by understanding it as the thing I require to provide comfort for me when I feel tired and want to sit down. The act of ascribing meaning to things gives rise in me to a sense of ownership and agency in my experiences, which, in turn, binds me, through my attachments, to the temporal world.<sup>318</sup>

Scholar of Theravāda Buddhism Steven Collins (1990) maintains that the delusion of a permanent self leads a person to emphasise self-preservation and self-gratification as a priority in their lives. These two desires initiate feelings of anxiety because they increase a person’s concern for their own wellbeing, and for their prospects—whether that be, a concern with material wealth, health, personal relationships, and so on. Moreover, as Phra Medhidhammaporn notes, through consciousness and self-awareness a person “idealistically creates the material world” in their own image and establishes themselves at the centre of this deluded conception of reality, alongside a deluded sense of ‘conventional truth’ (*sammuti-sacca*) of how one ought to perceive this world.<sup>319</sup>

The aggregates—specifically, *viññāṇa* —establish a concept of selfhood and enable one to distinguish oneself from other temporal phenomena, and in so doing, they are considered to be a root cause of the *pañca nīvaraṇāni* (five hindrances). The *pañca nīvaraṇāni* are five mental factors that ‘hinder’ or obstruct a person’s progression towards awakening (*bodhi*), through sensory desires (*kāmacchanda*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*), sloth (*thīna-middha*), restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*) and doubt (*vicikicchā*). These five afflictions are thought to

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<sup>318</sup> Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravada Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.4.

<sup>319</sup> Medhidhammaporn, *Satre’s Existentialism and Early Buddhism*, p.132.

impede meditative progress by preventing a person from progressing through a succession of cultivated mental states (called the *jhānas*), which lead to a "state of perfect equanimity and awareness (*upekkhī-sati-piirisuddhī*)."<sup>320</sup> This is explored in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN 2:74-75), for instance in the Buddha's proclamation:

As long, Sire, as a monk does not perceive the disappearance of the five hindrances in himself, he feels as if in debt, in sickness, in bonds, in slavery, on a desert journey. But when he perceives the disappearance of the five hindrances in himself, it is as if he were freed from debt, from sickness, from bonds, from slavery, from the perils of the desert. And when he knows that these five hindrances have left him, gladness arises in him, from gladness comes delight, from the delight in his mind his body is tranquillised, with a tranquil body he feels joy, and with joy his mind is concentrated. Being thus detached from sense-desires, detached from unwholesome states, he enters and remains in the first *jhāna*.<sup>321</sup>

Out of the five hindrances, it is *uddhacca-kukkucca* that is related specifically to anxiety, due to its characterisation as an inability to calm the mind—which creates another possible area of comparison with *angest*, given that both present anxiety as the cause of a restless mind that is overcome with self-concern. The term *uddhacca-kukkucca* is made up of two distinct terms. The first, *uddhacca*, is conventionally used to signify restlessness or agitation; which is to say, it denotes a conflict with the mental calm and tranquillity of mind that is sought within Buddhism. Scholar of Theravāda Buddhism, Bhikkhu Anālayo (2008) attributes the origin of *uddhacca* to an "excessive striving", where one's determination to achieve a

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<sup>320</sup>Tilman Vetter, *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), p.5.

<sup>321</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, p.102.

specific goal (whether it be materialistic or spiritual in nature), leads to feelings of agitation, and an inability to achieve a calm repose until the goal has been achieved. Anālayo likens this to the passage in *Tikanipāta* (AN 3:102), where a goldsmith continually blows on gold that has caught alight, until the gold is burnt.<sup>322</sup> Anālayo suggests that this sutta demonstrates that a preoccupation with, or fixation on, leads to mental restlessness, and encourages one to become overwhelmed by *chanda* (a desire) for progression. In this respect, a person can become all-consumed with the idea of personal success and achievement of specific goals to such an extent that they fail to achieve the mental tranquillity required for the practice of *dhamma*. This will ultimately lead to a decline in discipline, and a complete loss of focus on the teachings of the *Tathāgata*. The threat which *uddhacca* poses to one's ability to obtain enlightenment is well documented within the Pāli texts. Not only is it recognised within the five hindrances through the inclusion of *uddhacca-kukkucca*, but also in its inclusion as the fourth of the five higher fetters, which states that one free oneself of the subtlest form of *uddhacca* through enlightenment. It is important to note, therefore, that *restlessness* will be present throughout a person's life prior to their enlightenment.

The second aspect of *uddhacca-kukkucca* is *kukkucca*. Anālayo defines this as 'worry'. In reference to the *Visuddhimagga*, Anālayo states worry, is closely related to feelings of regret,<sup>323</sup> so that worry, he claims, is most commonly experienced as a concern about "what

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<sup>322</sup> *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, pp.338-339.

<sup>323</sup> It should be noted that in spite of the negative connotations which are often presented in Buddhist literature when discussing *Kukkucca*, Anālayo maintains that at times worry is necessary for those who follow the Theravāda path. For insists he maintains that worrying about the consequence of an event before it happens, can ensure that one recognises that certain actions have negative consequences, such as deterring one from the Buddhist path. Therefore, he states that worry can help one in the quest to enlightenment in some circumstances. However, allowing oneself to become worried over materialistic pursuits or how *kamma* may impact one's life etc. can distract one from practicing the *dhamma* thus in these circumstances can



has been done [or] what has not been done”.<sup>324</sup> This understanding has interesting ramifications for the concept of *kamma*, as it suggests that a person will often become apprehensive about the possible outcomes of their actions.<sup>325</sup> In this regard, *kukkucca* can be understood as a product of self-interest, where a person is consumed with how previous decisions they have made may impact on future outcomes. As such, Anālayo contends that *kukkucca* reveals our attachments to our sense of self, for when a person worries, it usually stems from their desire for reward for good deeds, or fear of punishment for transgressions. This self-absorption has significant repercussions on a person’s mental clarity, causing states of anger, pride, arrogance, regret, and so on. *Kukkucca* subsequently prevents a person from remaining focused on the *dhmma*, diverting their attention, instead, to their deluded sense of ‘I’. Of the two conceptions that constitute *uddhacca-kukkucca*, it is *kukkucca* that has the strongest resemblance to Kierkegaard’s *angest*, due to its concern for the outcomes of one’s actions. Kierkegaard depicts *angest* as a feeling of foreboding, or apprehension—a feeling that emphasises the fact that *angest* is an expression of concern for our future wellbeing, that forces us to consider how our actions will impede on our futures,<sup>326</sup> which again, highlights how both *angest* and the Buddhist model of anxiety are engrained in self-interest, further reinforcing the link between anxiety and *saṅkhārā-dukkha*.

From this it can be deduced that the concept of *uddhacca-kukkucca* disperses the mind, leading to an inability to concentrate on the present moment, and diverting attention to

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become harmful. For more on this see Anālayo, <https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/Anālayo/encyclopedia-entries/uddhaccakukkucca.pdf>.

<sup>324</sup> Anālayo, ‘Encyclopaedia of Buddhism vol.7: Uddhaccakukkucca’, <https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/Anālayo/encyclopedia-entries/uddhaccakukkucca.pdf>, 9 February 2017.

<sup>325</sup> This will be explored in more detail later within this chapter see pages 142-158.

<sup>326</sup> Kenneth Hamilton, ‘Man: Anxious or Guilty? A Second Look at Kierkegaard’s: The Concept of Dread’, in *The Christian Scholar* vol.46, no.4 (1963), p.297.

past or future concerns. This is made clear in the *Bojjhaṅgasamyutta* (SN 46:55) where the Buddha professes:

Suppose, brahmin, there is a bowl of water stirred by the wind, rippling, swirling, churned into wavelets. If a man with good sight were to examine his own facial reflection in it, he would neither know nor see it as it really is. So too, brahmin, when one dwells with a mind obsessed by restlessness and remorse ... on that occasion even those hymns that have been recited over a long period do not recur to the mind, let alone those that have not been recited.<sup>327</sup>

*Uddhacca-kukkucca* is therefore deemed contradictory to the aims of meditative practices, such as *vipassanā*, as it binds one to the material world, and compels one to view oneself as a being of continuous existence. Likewise, in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN 2:74), *uddhacca-kukkucca* is compared to slavery, for it is thought to control the mind, enslaving it to external concerns, and restricting its capacity for awakening.<sup>328</sup> Hence, Anālayo states that, through *uddhacca-kukkucca*, “inner-stability [is] lost”,<sup>329</sup> and the mind is thrown into an endless cycle of agitation.<sup>330</sup> *Uddhacca-kukkucca* can be understood, therefore, as originating in a deluded sense of self, for it arises when one strives for self-preservation or satisfaction, and thereby indicates that a person is still perceiving themselves as a solid entirety, rather than an impermanent collection of mental and physical factors.

Following my discussion about the relationship between *viññāṇa* and *uddhacca-kukkucca*, we are now in a position to see that self-consciousness is a significant factor in the cause of

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<sup>327</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, pp.1612-1613.

<sup>328</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, p.102.

<sup>329</sup> Anālayo, ‘Encyclopaedia of Buddhism vol.7: Uddhaccakukkucca’, <https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/Anālayo/encyclopedia-entries/uddhaccakukkucca.pdf>, 9 February 2017.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

anxiety, and that this is a key point of convergence with Kierkegaard's concept of *angest*.

This is primarily due to the fact that anxiety stems from an attachment to ego. Indeed, as De Silva notes, to anxiety is "born out of ego-centred desires".<sup>331</sup> In making this claim, De Silva—and other scholars, such as Madura Venkata Ram Kumar Ratnam (2003)—contend that anxiety is rooted in *taṇhā*, for it arises when a person craves a specific experience or specific object in the belief that it will grant them lasting satisfaction. It is on this basis that De Silva claims that self-consciousness or self-awareness can arise from our strivings for material pleasures—for one can become aware of oneself through feelings of need or desire.<sup>332</sup>

This reveals an interesting point of convergence with Kierkegaard's concept of *angest*, on the basis that *angest* also stems from self-awareness. Indeed, as Kierkegaardian scholar and translator Arne Grøn (2008) explains in the preface to his translation of *Begrebet Angest*, self-consciousness (*selvbevidsthed*) is vital to a person's recognition of their infinite nature. It is only through self-reflection that one can become aware of their ability to carve out their future and make choices to influence (*indflydelse*) the direction of their lives.<sup>333</sup> *Angest* is thus a product of self-consciousness as it only arises at the point when a person recognises their potential to freely make decisions. This point is illustrated in *Begrebet Angest* when Adam recognises that he has the freedom to sin, and thus to choose a path that is different to God's intentions; as a consequence of this recognition, he experiences *angest*.

Scholars, John S. Tanner (1992) and Julia Watkin (2010), subsequently equate the term 'self-consciousness' with Kierkegaard's concept of the Spirit (*Ånd*); as both concepts clearly

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<sup>331</sup> De Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, p.49.

<sup>332</sup> Ratnam, *Dukkha: Suffering in Early Buddhism*, p.72.

<sup>333</sup> Arne Grøn, *The Concept of Anxiety in Søren Kierkegaard*, B. L. Knox (trans) (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008), p.30.

indicate that *choice* is central to human nature.<sup>334</sup> Watkin explains how anxiety (*angest*) reveals the tension between a person's "biological and spiritual life",<sup>335</sup> and concludes that humanity is instinctively governed by selfish urges that seek gratification from temporal pleasures (as opposed to the spiritual urge to sacrifice oneself to God). Anxiety, in this reading, expresses a person's inner turmoil, specifically, in their awareness that actions are self-determined, and that they are ultimately morally responsible for them. It is thus through the capacity for self-awareness that a person is aware that they possess moral agency and are free to conform to the will of God or undertake sinful activity. This important notion is supported by Kierkegaard's remark—speaking as Haufniensis—in *Begrebet Angest*: "the content of freedom is truth, and truth makes man free".<sup>336</sup> Here, Kierkegaard insinuates that *angest*/anxiety allows a person to recognise their potential, as it brings them into relation with their infinite capabilities.

There are evident parallels here between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhist thought, for we find, too, in Buddhism the important role granted to self-awareness, and the recognition that one is ultimately responsible for one's choice and actions in the world. Similar to De Silva's third mode of anxiety, Kierkegaard through Haufniensis emphasises how *angest* reveals our human preoccupation with the material world, and our relationship with it. Haufniensis describes *angest* as the most "selfish of things",<sup>337</sup> due to our human tendency to choose temporal pleasures over spiritual liberation. Haufniensis continues to note that *angest* arises from a longing for material pleasures, and this is, he says, "the

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<sup>334</sup>Tanner, *Anxiety in Eden: A Kierkegaardian Reading*, p.72.

<sup>335</sup> Julia Watkin, *The A to Z of Kierkegaard's Philosophy* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2010), p.16.

<sup>336</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, as found in Dan Magurshak 'The Concept of Anxiety: The Keystone of the Kierkegaard-Heidegger Relationship', in *International Kierkegaard Commentary [vol.8]: The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issues of Hereditary Sin*, Robert L. Perkins (ed) (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), p.185.

<sup>337</sup>Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.75.

selfish infinity of possibility, which does not tempt like a choice but disquietens seductively with its sweet apprehensiveness”.<sup>338</sup> Therefore, *angest*, according to Haufniensis, is rooted in self-interest, thereby reflecting the Pāli teaching of *uddhacca-kukkuccain*—a situation that causes a person to lose sight of their potential for overcoming their (all-too) human condition, and diverting their attention instead to temporal matters, rooted in immediate self-gratification.

Of course, it is important to point out, too, that there are also key differences between the Buddhist concept of anxiety and Haufniensis’ notion of *angest*. Most notably, while the Buddhist conception is rooted in the idea that anxiety arises through a failure to recognise the true impermanence of nature, Haufniensis contends that *angest* arises from an awareness of infinite potential. In this way, what constitutes self-awareness within both systems is radically different from each other. As was made clear within De Silva’s model, the third form of anxiety is unrelated to the realisation of one’s true nature (which is to say, one is ultimately linked to the impermanent nature stipulated by the five aggregates), but is, rather, rooted in the deluded belief of one’s permanence. Thus, when I claim that anxiety arises in a Buddhist context out of ‘self-awareness’, I am not suggesting that it arises from discovering one’s *true* nature, but, rather, that a *deluded* sense of self gives rise to ego-cantered desires. Self-awareness in the Buddhist context, therefore, corresponds to a self-interest that is itself founded on a false impression of oneself (as a permanent self). Alternatively, Haufniensis’ *angest* is founded on the individual’s ability to recognise that he or she comprises both finite and infinite aspects, thereby recognising the entirety of their ontological condition. In this respect, it could be concluded that Buddhism identifies this

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

form of anxiety as a form of *ignorance*—arising from an erroneous belief about the nature of reality—whilst Haufniensis identifies *angest* as a form of discovery of truth about the nature of being.

From my discussion it is clear that the relationship between *dukkha* and *angest* is much more complex than previous scholars have suggested. Similarities are certainly apparent between the two, such as the recognition that anxiety arises through a person's preoccupation with the material world, and through the striving for material pleasure at the cost of spiritual enhancement. However, previous scholarship has failed to address the clear differences between the two, which, as I have argued, are apparent when one considers the emphases that the final form of *dukkha* places on the doctrine of *anattā* and the five aggregates. As I have shown, these emphases establish a clear point of distinction between the two systems, with *angest* stemming from a recognition of one's *true* nature, whilst De Silva's third model is more closely related, I claim, to ignorance and *self-deception*. And yet, in spite of this notable difference, there remains one key point of convergence between the two models, which, as I wish to argue, highlights a new and exciting comparison between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism. This is the emphasis that both systems place on freedom and responsibility. I mentioned this topic very briefly earlier, within this chapter (see pages 115-119), when I commented on the role that Kierkegaard gives to self-awareness, and how this corresponds to the beliefs inspired by the teachings of the Pāli Canon that, through the interplay of the five aggregates, a person has the ability to establish their identity and to choose to act in the world. This area of comparison is significant as it opens up a dialogue concerning the role of freedom and responsibility within both systems. To this topic I now turn.

## Free Will and Responsibility

Free will plays a vital role within the Buddhist understanding of anxiety, as does moral responsibility within the Pāli texts.<sup>339</sup> This focus on moral agency and responsibility can create an additional source of anxiety for a person, causing them to worry about the moral validity of their actions, and, in turn, the *kammic* consequences of them. Later in this chapter (see pages 154-158), I shall discuss how this issue correspond with Kierkegaard's concept of *angest*. But for now, let us return to establishing the significance of responsibility within Buddhism.

De Silva suggests that the Buddha rejected the various forms of determinism that were prevalent in the religious movements of his time—in particular, *issara-kāraṇa-vāda* (theistic determinism), *svabhāva-vāda* (natural determinism) and *pubba-kamma-vāda* (*kammic* determinism).<sup>340</sup> By rejecting *issara-kāraṇa-vāda*, the Buddha shifts the focus of ethical conduct away from notions of divinity, to present human nature as autonomous, with the capacity to act with moral agency, as opposed to divine guidance. The Buddha therefore outwardly challenges the idea that a specific deity has pre-ordained the events of an individual's life, for if life was forced to conform to a divine plan or structure, it would mean that humanity only possesses the illusion of choice, for they would be predetermined to act according to God's plan. According to K.N. Jayatilleke (2009), theological determinism is in

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<sup>339</sup>De Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, p.7.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid, p.109.

direct opposition to the teachings of Buddhism, as it implies that one can act only in accordance with God's plans—a position that renders obsolete the idea of self-liberation.<sup>341</sup>

*Svabhāva-vāda* was also rejected by the Buddha along similar lines, in so far as, it too, denied human beings the capacity to make independent decisions, suggesting, instead, that a person's choices were determined by their hereditary physical constitution (*abhijāti-hetu*). *Svabhāva-vāda* was a primitive form of psychic determinism that asserts that a person's past actions and experiences determine their future decisions (*pubbekata-hetu*), making a person hostage to their history.<sup>342</sup> Jayatilleke argues that this notion of determinism is in complete contrast to the central beliefs of Buddhism due to its removal of personal choice and intention, and subsequent eradication of the dichotomy of moral and immoral action. Jayatilleke claims this poses major challenges for the Buddhist notion of *kamma*, as this system is grounded in the notion of volitional effort.

The Buddha's criticism of *pubba-kamma-vāda* (*kammic* determinism) is more complex than the previous two rejections. This is due to the fact that *kamma*, and its associated consequences, have a significant place within Buddhist cosmology, with many practitioners still understanding *kamma* as a metaphysical system of rewards and punishment that maintains this cosmic order.

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<sup>341</sup> K.N. Jayatilleke, *Facets of Buddhist Thought: Collected Essays* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2009), p.200.

<sup>342</sup> This form of predetermination is too rejected by Kierkegaard, for in allowing one's choices are made as a result of their physical constitution, it would imply that one is governed completely by their finite aspects. This would be seen by Kierkegaard as neglecting the spiritual or infinite aspect of humanity, which are made evident in the Book of Genesis when God breathes life into Adam. This infinite aspect, according to Kierkegaard, ensures that humanity possess the will to choose their actions, being free to respond or to reject God within their lives. It is this infinite aspect which gives rise to *angest* through by enabling humanity to choose for themselves instead of having their life governed by biological factors.



The complexity of this topic is reflected in Peter Harvey's 2007 publication *Freedom of the Will: in the Light of Theravāda Buddhist Teachings*, with his insistence that the approach of Indian religions to philosophical questions concerning free will has been "rather sporadic".<sup>343</sup> This is due to the fact, he claims, to the diversity within Asian religions—with religions, such as Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, all professing a unique stance on the issue. Historically, this diversity has led to confusion within the West, at to the nature of *kamma*, and how it ought to be understood within each tradition. Indeed, according to the scholar of Tibetan Buddhism Ngakpa Chögyam (2010), people in the West tend to adopt a generalised view of *kamma* that ignores the significant differences and religious and philosophical conceptions of the idea adopted in different traditions.<sup>344</sup> This, Harvey claims, has resulted in an oversimplified approach to *kamma* in the West—one that regards *kamma* as an all-encompassing determinist system that determines every aspect of an individual's life, from their personal traits to their financial assets.<sup>345</sup> However, Harvey observes that this deterministic definition of *kamma* is not simply a Western stereotype, but is one also employed by a number of academics. For example, metaphysician Charles Goodman (2002) insists that the Buddhist tradition can be interpreted as:

[offering] a way to give up both the theory and practice of moral responsibility, and thereby to escape to the need to believe in the indefensible notion of free will.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Peter Harvey, "'Freedom of the Will' in the Light of Theravāda Buddhist Teachings' in *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol.14 (2007), p.39.

<sup>344</sup> Ngakpa Chögyam, *Rays of the Sun: Illustrating Reality Certainty, Transcending Causality, Kindness, Confidence* (Penarth: Aro Books Worldwide, 2010), p.11.

<sup>345</sup> Susana Gubkin, *A Movement Towards the Emergence of a Planetary Consciousness: The Case of the San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, 1995), p.71.

<sup>346</sup> Charles Goodman, 'Resentment and Reality: Buddhism on Moral Responsibility', in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol.39, no.4 (2002), p.361.

Goodman thus suggests that the doctrine of *kamma* can be misconceived as enabling us to attribute a person's thoughts and actions to *kammic* consequence, for it claims that the ability of a person to make decisions is determined by the *kammic* implications of that person's previous lives.

Approaches to Buddhism that present it in terms of hard or strict determinism have been vigorously contested. This is owing to the fact that such interpretations are seen to discount or overlook a wealth of material found within the Pāli Canon that places great emphasis on the individual responsibilities of people for their decisions and their actions.<sup>347</sup> For example, in *Devadūta Sutta* (MN 130:2-6), Yama, the Lord of death is seen to chastise a malefactor as he arrives in the hell realm, stating that, as his evil deeds were committed by him alone, and not by any accomplice, he must endure its *kammic* consequence.<sup>348</sup> From this, it is evident that the approach to *kamma* explored by Goodman is not in keeping with the Pāli teachings, for in order to merit *kamma*, and, moreover, to experience its consequences, a person must first possess a certain level of freedom in order to merit the *kamma* in the first place.

Therefore, I wish to claim that it is erroneous to suggest that *kamma* suggests hard determinism or that it eradicates personal responsibility; the system ultimately rests on the notion that a person possess a level of freedom that enables them first to act within the world, and, second, to merit *kamma* based on their actions and intentions.

This position that I endorse is furthered by Harvey, with reference to *Vedanāsaṃyutta* (SN 36:21), which states:

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<sup>347</sup>Harvey, "'Freedom of the Will" in the Light of Theravāda Buddhist Teachings', p.41.

<sup>348</sup> It should be noted here that this passage does not infer that past actions are performed by a permanent ontological self, but rather they are carried out by a previous aspect of the continuity of the mental and physical processes of the five aggregates.

[l]n bile...in phlegm ...in the winds (of the body) ...from a union of humors (of the body) ...born of a change of season ...born of the stress of circumstances ...due to (someone else's) effort (*opakkamikāni*)... and some things that are experienced here, Sīvaka, arise born of the maturing of karma. <sup>349</sup>

Peter Harvey alludes to this passage to claim that the Buddha clearly thought there were various causes for the experiences (*vedayitāni*)<sup>350</sup> that a person encounters throughout life. It would, therefore, be oversimplifying Buddhist philosophy simply to state that all events occur as a product of *kamma*. Rather, events can accrue within one's life that are circumstantial and not a result of *kammic* reproduction. This important idea is also apparent in *Adusalacchedanapañha* of the *Milindapañha*, where the monk, Nāgasena, asserts that *kamma* does not initiate all events with the analogy of bodily wind, which, he says, can be the product of numerous physical complaints, and not necessarily the product of one's *kamma*. Nāgasena continues to note: "Therefore it is not right to say: "All ailments are due to kamma".<sup>351</sup> It is clear, that *kamma* should not be regarded as a rigid product of hard determinism, for, as is made clear throughout the *Milindapañha* and numerous other texts, both a person's unique experiences, and, moreover, their response to such experiences, are not exclusively moulded by *kammic* consequence. Accordingly, it would be a mistake to interpret *kamma* as a form of fatalism, as the Pāli Canon does not recognise it as an aspect that directs every aspect of a person's life; only a relatively small number of events will be the product of one's *kamma* coming to fruition. This means that the Pāli texts imparts that

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<sup>349</sup>Harvey, "Freedom of the Will" in the Light of Theravāda Buddhist Teachings', p.51.

<sup>350</sup>This term is usually used to denote feelings or sensations.

<sup>351</sup> 'The Questions of King Milinda a translation of the *Milindapañha* by U Pu', p.219, <http://www.shanyoma.org/yoma/Questions-of-King-Milinda.pdf>, 12 July 2017.

humans are free to direct their own life,<sup>352</sup> providing a further point of correspondence to Kierkegaard's philosophy, with both systems of thought recognising humans as autonomous moral agents, possessing freedom of choice. As will become apparent, freedom is a central aspect of Kierkegaard's existentialism, with philosophical commentator Louis Pojman (1990) advocating, for instance, that the interrelated themes of freedom and responsibility are at the heart of Kierkegaard's ontological musings.<sup>353</sup> As I shall explain later in this chapter, Kierkegaard's assertion that humans have free will and are responsible for their actions, echoes Buddhist philosophy. Both systems of thought recognise that an individual's awareness of their moral agency gives rise to feelings of anxiety or *angest*. This, again, emphasises the egotistic nature of the unenlightened mind.

It is clear, that *kamma* is not thought to infringe upon one's freedom of choice. In spite of the fact that *kamma* has traditionally been recognised as causing character traits within individuals, Buddhism continues to recognise that a person has a choice in how they respond to these traits. Thus, within *Devadūta Sutta* (MN 130:25), for instance, one discovers that if a person is reborn in hell, it will take them an inordinate amount of time before they can be reborn within the human realm, and when this does eventually happen, their *kamma* will be such that they will be born into difficult circumstances—they will be ugly, poor or deformed, and aggressive, and will have other negative traits that will make them vulnerable to *pāpa* (bad *kamma*), and the possibility of being reborn into the hell realm again in their next life.<sup>354</sup> Correspondingly, a virtuous individual, who adheres to the *dhamma* will be reborn into the heavenly realm, and, only occasionally, and after countless

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<sup>352</sup>Donald K. Swearer, 'Control and Freedom: The Structure of Buddhist Meditation in the Pāli Suttas', in *Philosophy East and West* vol.23, no.4 (1973), p.447.

<sup>353</sup>Louis P. Pojman, 'Kierkegaard on Faith and Freedom', in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* vol.27, no.1/2 (1990), p.48.

<sup>354</sup>'*Bāla Paṇḍita Sutta*' (MN 129:22-28), in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp.1020-1022.

years, will find themselves reborn as a human. As a human, they will be bestowed with privilege, with good looks, material wealth, and with such virtues that ensure their future rebirth is, again, in the heavenly realm.<sup>355</sup>

Textual evidence clearly reveals, therefore, that *kamma* impacts upon the character and temperament that a person possesses throughout their rebirth. However, this is not to say that a person isn't free to overcome these traits. Thus, within the *Therīgāthā*, there is a passage about a woman, who had previously suffered a series of bad rebirths in both the hell realm and the animal realms. When she was eventually reborn as a human, she freely chooses to follow the Buddha's teaching, and, as a consequence, becomes an *arahat*.<sup>356</sup> By the same token, the scholar Peter Harvey, indicates that Siddhāttha Gotama, himself, underwent a period of fruitless asceticism as a result of *pāpa*, before he was able to change his behaviour, and achieve enlightenment and Buddhahood.<sup>357</sup> From this, it is apparent that even though certain traits and characteristics are undoubtedly a product of one's past *kamma*, this does not mean there exists a "deterministic chain",<sup>358</sup> which one is unable to overcome and break free from. It should be recognised, I contend, that the Buddha taught the possible overcoming of negative character through the freedom to *choose* the practice of *dhamma*. Therefore, one is always able to choose whether to act on one's impulses or to overcome them. If this were not the case, then *kamma* would be a logical fallacy, where a person is fated to repeat the same transgressions and is not responsible for them. This is summarised by Harvey as follows:

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid, pp.1027-1028.

<sup>356</sup> Harvey, "Freedom of the Will" in the Light of Theravāda Buddhist Teachings', pp.49-50.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid, p.52.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid, p.56.

Buddhism accepts "freedom of the will" in the sense that before one acts, one can and should stop and reflect on things to assess its moral suitability (M.I.415-416). One should be mindful of emotions and motives, etc., and guide how they or other factors influence one's actions. One's willing, and action is conditioned but not rigidly determined.<sup>359</sup>

It is clear that, although *kamma* has a role to play in determining the nature of a person's rebirth and may influence their character traits or events in life, it does not eradicate the free will of that person. This much is clear in such texts as *Milindapañha* and the *Therīgāthā*, wherein the Buddha reveals that one can respond freely to their circumstances, and, through meditation, can overcome negative character traits, such as anger and greed. This means that the impact of *pāpa* can be overcome by *choosing* the *dhamma*, even in the face of *kammic* limitations. This point is hugely significant to comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, as it means that a person cannot validly blame *kamma* for their misfortune, for they are—as both Buddhism and Kierkegaard maintain—*personally responsible* for their actions and intentions.

Asaf Federman (2010) highlights the significance of personal responsibility within Buddhism as follows:

Buddhism rejects the idea that free will exists outside the causal nexus, and at the same it affirms that people can choose and take responsibility for their choices. Choosing right action is not derived from a supernatural or super-causal origin. It is derived from wise contemplation over the possible consequences. This wisdom

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid, p.84.

enables free will, and is a faculty that can be developed. What limits free will is not causality itself [karma or determinism], but various mental compulsions.<sup>360</sup>

Likewise, Wesley Teo (1973) maintains that personal responsibility fundamental to Buddhist philosophy, as it is an individualistic approach to enlightenment, which, he says:

affirms without compromise the view that man's lot is determined by his own effort or lack of it, and not the result of any capricious will or action of the gods, the devils, or any other forces outside of man himself.<sup>361</sup>

By recognising that awakening is achievable only through individual action, the Pāli texts have created a system that forces a person to accept responsibility for their actions. Teo continues to note that, unlike other religious systems, Buddhism does not maintain that liberation from temporal existence is granted by the grace of God; rather, the impetus rests entirely on the individual's willingness to apply the Buddha's teachings to their own lives, and, as a consequence of this, free themselves from the bonds of *saṃsāra*. Furthermore, by recognising that liberation is achieved through the individual's own actions, Buddhism places responsibility for all action on the person themselves, making them accountable for their adverse and undesirable behaviours. As Krishna Saksena (1970) notes: "everyone is exclusively and completely responsible for his or her actions and their consequences. No individual is saved or condemned by any force outside himself".<sup>362</sup> Although this reveals an area of conflict between Kierkegaard and Buddhism (in so far as Kierkegaard maintains that the final salvation is achieved through the grace of God—an important idea that will be

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<sup>360</sup> Asaf Federman, 'What Kind of Free Will Did the Buddha Teach?', in *Philosophy East and West* vol.60, no.1 (2010), p.15.

<sup>361</sup> Teo, 'Self-Responsibility in Existentialism and Buddhism', p.83.

<sup>362</sup> Shri Krishna Saksena, *Essays on Indian Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1970), p.93.

discussed in more detail in Chapter Four see pages 240-249), it must be noted that both systems of thought insist that all individuals are completely responsible for their actions. Indeed, philosopher David Stern (2003) underscores the point that Kierkegaard places great value on the role of responsibility and self-justification, to the extent that every person must be able defend their decisions before God if they are to attain salvation.<sup>363</sup> This is supported in *Begrebet Angest* when Haufniensis states “Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the truth of the ultimate”<sup>364</sup>—a claim that clearly indicates that it is imperative that a person realises they are answerable before God.

In order to support his assertion that a person is accountable for his or her actions, Teo employs the universal law of *kamma*. In other words, he emphasises the idea that through the *kammic* consequence, a person is either rewarded or punished for their past deeds and are therefore ultimately held accountable for them. In direct contrast to Goodman’s presentation of *kamma* as a form of hard determinism, therefore, Teo maintains that *kamma* emphasises the freedom of all beings. This relates to De Silva’s third model of anxiety, because it suggests that practitioners may feel compelled to live a life of ‘inaction’, by trying to escape the responsibility of their actions. For, the idea of being held accountable can give rise to anxiety—especially anxiety over the potential impact of *pāpa*.

Both De Silva and Teo, therefore, recognise that having to accept personal responsibility for one’s actions can give rise to anxiety. Teo, in particular, likens this notion to existential philosophy, for both Buddhism and existential philosophy propose, he notes, that every action stems from a personal choice and free decision on the part of the individual. Alluding

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<sup>363</sup>David S. Stern, ‘The Bind of Responsibility: Kierkegaard, Derrida, and the Akedah of Isaac’, in *Philosophy Today* vol.47, no.1 (Spring, 2003), pp.36

<sup>364</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.59.



to Sartre, Teo explains that should a person be drafted into the army to fight in a war, regardless of their motivation to do so—whether they are happy to take up arms or are doing so out of coercion from the state—it is their decision to participate. In other words, Teo maintains that due to free will, a person is responsible for every decision they make. A person cannot legitimately claim, therefore, that they were forced to fight in a war, as they had the ability to ignore the government’s request if they so wished. Teo continues to note that one’s human capacity to make choices signifies that they are individually responsible for the outcomes of their actions.

Teo asserts that this Sartrean analogy reflects the Buddhist conception of moral volition or will (*cetanā*), for it suggests that all of our actions—regardless of whether they are words, deeds or thoughts—should be understood as wilful actions that one has freely chosen. A similar point is made in the teachings of Bhikkhu Bodhi (2003), who recognises that *cetanā* is “the most significant mental factor in generating *kamma*, since it is volition that determines the ethical quality of the action”.<sup>365</sup> Bodhi suggests, therefore, that *cetanā* is the mental factor that leads to the actualisation of one’s chosen goal; it is, he says, the “volitional aspect of cognition”.<sup>366</sup> Moreover, the central characteristic of *cetanā* is, he claims, a state of willing, or, as he puts it: a “drive to action” that compels a person to perform specific actions in order to achieve the desired goal.<sup>367</sup> *Cetanā* is thus understood as a person’s intention or will, which is conditioned by effective cognitive elements (*vedana sanna*) that direct his or her focus to a certain object or goal. These cognitive elements can

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<sup>365</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi et al, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: The Abhidhammattha Sangaha*, Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed and trans) (Onalaska: Buddhist Publication Society, 2003), p.80.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> In this way it can be seen as a necessary function as it ensures that one completes rudimentary tasks that enable them to exist within the world. As such, it is recognised as one of the *sabbacittasādhāraṇa cetasikas* (seven universal mental factors), which are common to all conscious beings.

be conscious or unconscious,<sup>368</sup> which suggest they can lead a person to act either with or without conscious awareness and deliberation. Thus, Bodhi recognises *cetanā* as the *intention behind* one's actions—an intention that determines one's bodily (*kāya*), vocal (*vacasa*) and mental (*manasā*) actions.<sup>369</sup> Subsequently, *cetanā* is associated with the moral implications of an action. Indeed, as the Buddha taught, it is the intention behind a person's actions that has significant impact on whether it merits the impact of *kamma*. This is illustrated in the Buddha's proclamation in the *Catukkanipāta* (AN 2:233.1-2):

[A]nd what, bhikkhus, is dark kamma with dark result? Here, someone performs an afflictive bodily volitional activity, an afflictive verbal volitional activity, an afflictive mental volitional activity.<sup>370</sup>

For here, the Buddha exclaims that it is not necessarily the act itself that accrues *kammic* consequences, but, rather, one's intention or purpose for acting. A person is, thus, always responsible for their actions; they are impelled by their intentions; irrespective of whether a person's intentions are conscious or unconscious, he or she has still *chosen* to act in line with them. Therefore, the Pāli text teach that *all* actions are *wilful* actions.

Subsequently, the Pāli texts clearly uphold a belief in free will, in its recognition that a person has a choice before they act, and that person has the capacity to reflect on their urges and assess the morality of their intended action. One could argue that free will as presented in the Pāli texts is closely related to mindfulness, for a person is encouraged to consider the efficacy of their emotions or motivations before acting upon them. In this

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<sup>368</sup> Even if the intention is unconscious it is still held to produce *kamma*, for even if one's motivation is unconscious, one still has a choice to act on such an impulse, choosing to perform a specific action, even though they are unaware as to why they feel compelled to do so. As such, Buddhism holds that one is still accountable for such actions.

<sup>369</sup> Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), p.220.

<sup>370</sup> *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, pp.601-602.

fashion, Harvey contends that, even for the person who has a naturally aggressive disposition, Buddhism grants that person the choice to become angry or let the sensation pass.<sup>371</sup> Thus, by becoming aware of one's conditioned state through meditative reflection, one can master one's emotional responses, and in the process, reinforce one's ability to make moral decisions.

Freedom and responsibility are key themes that unite Buddhism and Kierkegaardian philosophy. In particular, these themes are found within Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angest* [*The Concept of Anxiety*] and other writings. As I argued in Chapter Two (see pages 51-66), Haufniensis' conception of *angest* is engrained in his belief that humans possess free will. Indeed, as Vanessa Rumble (1992) notes, the *central aim* of *Begrebet Angest* is to expound on our human capacity to harness our freedom, and, in the process, to recognise that we, as free individuals, are able to overcome our finite limitations by embracing our capacity to *choose*.<sup>372</sup> Similar to Buddhism, Haufniensis' philosophy advocates that a person can ignore his or her finite impulses, and can overcome their urges of anger, greed or lust, if they *choose* to do so. This is illustrated in Haufniensis' insistence that Adam was not forced to eat from the tree but did so voluntarily. Therefore—as I discussed in Chapter Two—sin, is, for Haufniensis, a matter of choice: a voluntary action. Likewise, I have explored how Haufniensis rejects the Church's conception of original sin—of an inherited compulsion to sin—and advocates instead, the freedom of humans to choose sin. The similarities here between Kierkegaard and Buddhism are, I claim, very clear, for both philosophical systems

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<sup>371</sup>Harvey, "'Freedom of the Will' in the Light of Theravāda Buddhist Teachings", p.52.

<sup>372</sup>Vanessa Rumble, 'The Oracle's Ambiguity: Freedom and Original Sin in Kierkegaard's "The Concept of Anxiety"', in *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* vol.75, no.4 (1992), p.611.

recognise that a person is free to choose how they act, and they are free to decide whether to be ruled by their emotions.

Throughout *Begrebet Angest*, the feeling of *angest* signifies that a person is no longer in a state of ignorance, but aware of their freedom, and able, therefore, to reflect on their feelings and choose their actions accordingly. In this way, *angest* highlights an ability to rise above emotions, for it reveals that one has a choice either to act on impulse or to reflect on how best to act. Haufniensis' approach here corresponds clearly with the concept of *cetanā*, as both maintain that a person is capable of choosing whether to act on impulse or take a more measured response. Subsequently, neither system advocates a philosophy of determinism, and both maintain that a person possesses moral agency and responsibility for their actions.

The theme of responsibility is present throughout the works of Kierkegaard. In *Frygt og Bæven* [*Fear and Trembling*], for instance, he asserts that a man, throughout his life, must "venture wholly to be [themselves], as an individual man, this definite individual man *alone before the face of God*, alone in tremendous exertion and in tremendous responsibility".<sup>373</sup> Although this passage appears in a work other than *Begrebet Angest*, it encapsulates some of the central ideas explored within *Begrebet Angest* that concern a person's moral responsibility. *Begrebet Angest* presents moral responsibility as intertwined and interrelated with the realisation individual freedom, so that, prior to self-awareness is a state of innocence that is characterised by moral ignorance. According to Haufniensis, therefore, a lack of awareness of one's freedom prevents one from acting with intent, for the innocent person does not act on the basis of their own will, but in response to the commands of

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<sup>373</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Alastair Hannay (trans) (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p.142.

others. It is only through self-awareness that a person can choose for themselves, and can become a moral agent, responsible for their actions. This means that *angest* is fundamental to ensuring one's moral accountability. This responsibility is heightened in feeling for those with a heightened sense of inwardness and introspection—in other words, those who Kierkegaard regarded as true Christians. This is because true Christians choose God as their ultimate concern, as opposed to the pleasures of the temporal world; thereby ensuring that they remain concerned with his ultimate judgement, as opposed to the lesser authorities perceived in human society. This notion is summarised in the *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler* [*Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*] (1846) by Kierkegaard, when his pseudonym, Climactus, claims that the “individual is in the truth, even if he related in this way to what untruth”<sup>374</sup>—which is to say, that the true Christian is able to remain focused on God despite his or her temporal status.

Responsibility is a vital concept to Kierkegaard, as it has a significant impact on a person's relationship with God—the individual will always, he argues, be accountable before the divine. Although, at a glance, this idea might seem in opposition to Buddhist philosophy, due to its significant theological connotations, the works of Malalasekera and Teo, suggest that *kamma* ensures that Buddhists are morally accountable, in a way not dissimilar to Kierkegaard's philosophy. Malalasekera and Teo both maintain that *kamma* is vital to ensuring the “moral dimension of human consciousness”,<sup>375</sup> as it acts as a reminder of one's accountability. Interestingly, both scholars hold radically different interpretations about the nature of *kamma*. While Malalasekera claims it is a metaphysical force that influences the

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<sup>374</sup>Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, p.167.

<sup>375</sup> Teo, ‘Self-Responsibility in Existentialism and Buddhism’, p.86.

events of one's current and future rebirths, Teo regards it as a "practical guide to living",<sup>376</sup> and, thus, not a cosmic force, but a kind of thought experiment, designed to force practitioners to assess the morality of their actions. While this distinction is significant, both thinkers nevertheless interpret *kamma* as a means of ensuring that practitioners acknowledge that they are responsible for their actions.

*Kamma*, I claim, plays a similar role to Kierkegaard's conception of God. For, on the one hand, if one considers Malalasekera's metaphysical approach to *kamma*, one will see *kamma*—as with Kierkegaard's God—enforces a cosmic order that determines whether one is rewarded or punished for one's actions. In this respect, *kamma* forces people to recognise that they are morally responsible, and accountable for their actions. Equally, on the other hand, if one considers Teo's more existential response to *kamma*, one will find strong parallels with Kierkegaard's existentialism, as both positions regard moral responsibility, and the need for a person to consider the moral implications of their actions, as a necessary condition for those seeking to live an authentic existence.<sup>377</sup>

I shall now return the discussion to the relationship between *angest* and *dukkha*, it should be clear that both concepts recognise that anxiety can arise in response to a person's realisation that they are morally accountable for their actions. Thus, the Buddhist concept of *kamma*—similar in respect to Kierkegaard's judgement before God—can be interpreted as fuelling the egotism that characterises the unenlightened mind. That is to say, those who remain subject to *saṅkhārā-dukkha*, and are subsequently consumed by the impression of 'I' and 'mine', are concerned about their *kammic* footprint, and as such, desire a good rebirth,

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid, p.85.

<sup>377</sup> By authentic existence I am refereeing to relation with God within a Kierkegaardian sense and *nibbāna* or enlightenment within Buddhism. The exact nature of these concepts and the associated similarities and differences between the two of them will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four (see pages 218-248).

owing to their deluded belief that there are aspects of their current existence that will continue into their next existence. This point is maintained by scholar of Buddhism, Bruce Matthews (1983), who, in a similar fashion to Tilakaratne, emphasises that one develops a sense of self (due to the aggregate, *viññāṇa*) that one desires to continue into the next life.<sup>378</sup> Therefore, it is clear that anxiety arises from an attachment to one's identity due to the inability of a person to recognise the conditioned nature of their existence. In this way, *angest* relates meaningfully with *saṅkhārā-dukkha*, as both conceptions are related to humanities tendency to become attached to their sense of self.

I have explained how the traditional comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism have been focused on the need to establish a relationship between *angest* and phenomena associated with *dukkha-dukkha*, and that this approach is too restrictive in its scope. However, whilst the works of Elwood and Smith have suffered due to their narrow approach, I have shown that there are meaningful parallels between *angest* and *dukkha*, not least, in their conception of the tendency of the unenlightened mind to find itself attached to sense a deluded sense of self. I have, therefore, shifted the focus away from comparisons between *angest* and *dukkha-dukkha*, to focus instead on the more ontological aspects of *saṅkhārā-dukkha*, in order to reveal how both Kierkegaard and Buddhist thought interpret anxiety as rooted in a person's sense of self—an anxiety that leads to an unavoidable egotism.

### The difference between Angest and Dukkha

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<sup>378</sup> Bruce Matthews, *Craving and Salvation: A Study in Buddhist Soteriology* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), p.47.

Despite the similarities that I have exposed in this chapter between Kierkegaard's philosophy and Buddhism, there are major points of departure between the two—notably, the teachings of the Pāli texts concerning enlightenment assert that it is possible for a person to escape the torments of *dukkha* within their life time (see pages 219-240). I will explain in Chapter Four (see pages 240-249) that this position differs from Kierkegaard's model, which advocates a two-tiered system of liberation, whereby a person is able to completely escape the persistent feeling of *angest* only at the point of death, and even then, only if granted eternal salvation through the grace of God.<sup>379</sup> As will become clearer in Chapter Four, *dukkha* is something that one can ultimately overcome through attaining enlightenment.<sup>380</sup>

### Summary

Throughout Chapter Three I have drastically shifted the focus of the existing parallels between *angest* and *dukkha* from the tendency in current scholarship that I have argued is problematic. In particular, I have exposed how *angest*—in similar respects to *saṅkhārā-dukkha*— is rooted in the individual's sense of 'I', which, in turn, gives rise to a problematic egotism that causes a person to become anxious about their future status. *Angest*, therefore, relates to the Buddhist notion of *uddhacca-kukkucca*, in so far as both concepts

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<sup>379</sup> Kierkegaardian scholar James Giles (2008) notes that Kierkegaard's *angest* is rooted in his theological beliefs, which is to say that the ultimate source of *angest* rests in a person's awareness that they are accountable for their action, and will be judged by God for their actions. He continues to note that *angest* is testimony to human free will, and clearly indicates that humans are unable to overcome *angest* during their lifetime, as *angest* "attends freedom" (Giles, 'Introduction: Kierkegaard Among the Temples of Kamakura', p.26).

<sup>380</sup> The Western term enlightenment is a translation of the Pāli term *Bodhi*, meaning awakening. Thus, signifying that enlightenment within the Buddhist tradition is understood as awakening to the true nature of reality. For more on this see Thomas William Rhys Davids & William Stede (1993).



denote a sense of apprehension about one's future. It is clear, therefore, that the similarities between *angest* and *dukkha* are not rooted in the notion of *suffering*, but, rather, in the notion of human *freedom* and the anxiety that arises when one recognises that one is *responsible* for one's actions. As I have made clear, in both systems of thought, a person's awareness of their moral responsibility is heightened by their belief in *kamma* or God, which serves as permanent reminder that one's actions have significant implications in one's current life *and* in their next life. It is clear, therefore, that *angest* and *dukkha* are similar with respect to the problematic repercussions of human freedom and egotism.

## Chapter Four: The Origins and Liberation from Suffering

Before I examine the role of craving temporal phenomena in the causation of suffering, I will develop the ideas and conclusions I explicated in Chapter Two (see pages 66-81) by assessing further the concepts of suffering and craving through the prism of Kierkegaard's *Evangeliet om Lidelser* [*The Gospel of Sufferings*], and also how Kierkegaard's musings within this text relate to his other writings. In particular, I shall explore the relationship between Kierkegaard's discussion in this work of our human preoccupation with temporal pleasures with his presentation of the aesthetic realm within his work *Enten – Eller* [*Either/Or*]. By approaching my examination in this way, I intend to show how Kierkegaard's perception of the temporal world as a root cause of human dissatisfaction and suffering, is developed throughout his wider works, and is, therefore, one of the most prominent philosophical ideas within Kierkegaard's corpus of work. Once I have established a comprehensive overview of Kierkegaard's works concerning our preoccupation with material pleasures, I shall analyse how his philosophy parallels the Buddhist teachings of the second and third Noble Truths.

### Taṇhā and Kierkegaard's Model of Suffering

Kierkegaard's reflections on the temporal world as a primary cause of human dissatisfaction are influenced by his reading of the Bible, as evidenced by the sheer number of Biblical references that are cited throughout *Evangeliet om Lidelser*. Kierkegaard frequently references the writings of St. Paul in his attempt to convey to his readers a clear distinction

between the limited nature of the temporal world and the perfections of the eternal life in heaven. For example, when Kierkegaard refers to St. Paul's proclamation in his first letter to the Corinthians<sup>381</sup> — "If we hope only for this life, we are the most miserable of all"<sup>382</sup> — Kierkegaard concludes that if one seeks lasting happiness throughout their earthly existence, they allow themselves to be deceived about the true nature of creation.<sup>383</sup> Kierkegaard infers from St. Paul teachings that eternal happiness, as he puts it, "belong[s] to the other world",<sup>384</sup> and can only be experienced by those who have willingly sacrificed their worldly attachments and given themselves completely to God. To hope, or search, for happiness within the temporal world is, Kierkegaard claims, misguided. This is because the temporal world can only lead to misery, as the fleeting nature of all temporal objects or experiences makes it impossible to secure lasting satisfaction. Allowing ourselves to strive for earthly pleasures is ultimately to allow ourselves to strive for misery, as all earthly pleasures eventually dissolve, leaving us in a state of despair. Kierkegaard subsequently urges his reader to "seek God's Kingdom first",<sup>385</sup> and encourages us to overcome our temporal cravings and harness our ability to overcome our finite nature. Only this, he claims, will liberate us from suffering.

This idea is developed in the theological work of Lee Barrett (2010), which concerns the relationship between Kierkegaard and the New Testament. This work briefly explores the role of *Evangeliet om Lidelser* in helping to establish a Kierkegaardian philosophy of human suffering and torment. Barrett argue that this work demonstrates how suffering "results

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<sup>381</sup> The exact passage quoted is 1 Corinthians 15:19.

<sup>382</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.228.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid, p.229.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid, p.210.

from the voluntary choice of a way of life”,<sup>386</sup> and thus, from a person’s own subjective response and approach to life. Barrett continues that the temporal world is a distraction, which entices and seduces us by granting us transient moments of pleasure. The feelings of gratification this evokes inevitably distracts a person and prevents them from recognising that lasting satisfaction is achievable only through meaningful relationship with God—which is to say, it is acquired by choosing a life focused on the eternal, and not the temporal. Kierkegaard asserts that “many live this way, deceived by temporality”,<sup>387</sup> which leads the many to seek out material pleasures over spiritual discipline and obedience. The preoccupation with temporal pleasure leads a person to neglect to ‘carry their cross’, and to neglect Christ’s teachings about the need for personal sacrifice. Kierkegaard continues to assert:

The deceived live this way in temporality: busily engaged with the necessities of life, they are either too busy to gain the extensive view, or in their prosperity and pleasant days they have as it were, the lanterns lit, have everything around them and so close to them so safe, so bright, so comfortable – but the extensive view is lacking.<sup>388</sup>

Thus, the temporal world compels humanity to strive to experience the pleasant and satisfying aspects of life, coercing them to become more and more immersed within temporal phenomena as a means of stimulating them and granting them pleasing sensations. Ultimately, this kind of seduction by the temporal world ensures that a person

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<sup>386</sup> Lee C. Barrett, ‘The Sermon on the Mount: The Dialectic of Exhortation and Conclusion’, in *Kierkegaard and the Bible. Tomb II: The New Testament*, Lee C. Barrett & Jon Bartley Stewart (eds) (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), p.46.

<sup>387</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.310.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

remains trapped within a perpetual cycle of suffering. Indeed, as was discussed in Chapter Two (see pages 66-81), Kierkegaard maintains that the fleeting nature of the temporal world leads inevitably to feelings of anguish and disappointment. By placing worldly pursuits over Christ's teachings of self-sacrifice, humanity invite suffering; only those who are willing to sacrifice their lives in the act of discipleship to Christ will be liberated from suffering and will experience joys of eternity.

The philosopher James Daniel Collins (1983) refers to Kierkegaard's understanding of the temporal world as one that is "restricted", and ultimately unsatisfying.<sup>389</sup> Collins suggests that Kierkegaard recognises the temporal world as lacking real 'substance', depicting it, instead, as a distraction that leads one away from their true substance and potential. Indeed, for Kierkegaard the temporal world establishes an existential distance between humans and God—an existential veil that hides one from their capacity to liberate themselves from suffering. By failing to realise the limitations of the temporal world, one ensures their continual suffering. Only the one who prizes the material above the spiritual is, as Kierkegaard puts it, destined to experience the "heaviest temporal suffering".<sup>390</sup>

Kierkegaard's presentation of the temporal world as an impermanent reality has significant parallels with Buddhist philosophy, in particular the second Noble Truth *samudaya*. I will discuss the exact meaning of *samudaya* shortly, but for now it is worth noting that *samudaya* explores the origins of *dukkha*, which it identifies as attachment or desire for impermanent states and phenomena.<sup>391</sup> Accordingly, both Kierkegaard and the Pāli texts recognise that the origins of human suffering is the impermanent nature of the material

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<sup>389</sup>James Daniel Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p.188.

<sup>390</sup>Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, pp.306-320.

<sup>391</sup> Ven. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1980), p.299.

world; and both systems of thought maintain that one of our biggest obstacles is the all too human desire for sensual gratification—a craving that is expressed in Buddhism as *kāma-taṇhā*: a craving for specific pleasures associated with temporal phenomena.<sup>392</sup> Due to the conditioned nature of temporal existence, however, the fleeing pleasures it evokes cause us continually to strive to recapture feelings of joy and elation that have been lost. Both systems of thought recognise that the temporal nature of such please gives rise to a certain kind of craving—one that binds a person to the material world and to its temporal objects or experiences, to such an extent that the realisation of true satisfaction and liberation becomes all the more difficult.

Before exploring these points of convergence between Kierkegaard and Buddhism in more depth, it is important to revisit the point made throughout Chapter Two that Kierkegaard presents—in both *Evangeliet om Lidelser* and *Indøvelse i Christendom* [*The Practice of Christianity*] (1850)—a twofold model of suffering, which I have categorised respectively, as a *human* suffering and *Christian* suffering. By revisiting Kierkegaard’s work, I hope to make clear how prominent the parallels between this aspect of his philosophy and Buddhism are, with particular reference to his notion of human suffering and how it relates to the Buddha’s conception of *taṇhā*.

Despite the distinct nature of these categories, both suggest important parallels with the teachings of the Pāli Canon. However, of the two, it is Kierkegaard’s emphasis on *human* suffering that provides us with the most interesting focus for our inquiry into the comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism. This is owing to the fact

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<sup>392</sup> It should be noted here that *samudaya* is a far broader term than this example suggests, as it is associated not just with material cravings, but also cravings for both being and non-being. However, this will be explored in more detail later within the chapter. Ultimately, the purpose of this example is to highlight the initial areas of conjunction between both systems.

that Kierkegaard's interpretation of human suffering—as a suffering grounded in our human inclination to become wholly preoccupied with the temporal world—demonstrates clear parallels with the Buddhist notion of *taṇhā* (craving). This point of comparison is important as it has been persistently overlooked by scholars in this field, in particular Lynn De Silva, Elwood and Smith. In light of this, I will aim, throughout the rest of this chapter, to explore the relationship between Kierkegaard's model of human suffering with the second Noble Truth, *samudaya*, by examining the related Buddhist concepts of *taṇhā*, and also of *anicca*. By approaching Kierkegaard's philosophy in light of these concepts, I intend to demonstrate that it is this aspect of Kierkegaard's philosophy that draws the most significant parallels with Buddhist philosophy. In so doing, I challenge the works of De Silva, Elwood and Smith, which mistakenly advocate that *dukkha* and *angest* as the most fruitful comparison between the two systems of thought.

As I have previously stated, the second of the Four Noble Truths, *samudaya*, is often defined as 'origin' or 'source'. *Samudaya* therefore explores the origins of *dukkha*—associating the origins of *dukkha* with cravings and attachment. As such, *samudaya* explores the negative mental states that give birth to the feelings of dissatisfaction that are encapsulated by the term *dukkha*. *Samudaya* is first introduced as part of the *Saccasaṃyutta* (MN 56:11), where the Buddha proclaims:

Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1844.

The second Noble Truth clearly describes the origin of *dukkha* as a product of a person's desire, and that the root cause of dissatisfaction within the temporal world is a result of *taṇhā*.<sup>394</sup> The Pāli word *taṇhā* is derived from the Sanskrit *tṛṣṇā*, a term that is often associated with 'drought' or 'thirst', and is most commonly used in the more poetic or emotionally charged of Buddhist writings. This has led Robert Morrison (1997) to regard the term as a particularly evocative one that is used to encourage practitioners to reflect on their own experiences of intense emotional yearning.<sup>395</sup> The term *taṇhā* is frequently associated in the English language with 'desire',<sup>396</sup> craving, or thirst,<sup>397</sup> and, as such, it is often characterised by a hunger or yearning for specific phenomena or states of being. However, the scholar of Buddhism, Rupert Gethin (1998) likens the term to an "unquenchable thirst"<sup>398</sup> that can never be satisfied, and in so doing, he implies that the Buddhist understanding of *taṇhā* cannot be conveyed adequately by conventional English translations of the term. This is because terms, such as desire or craving, are ordinarily used to refer to a 'want' that can be satisfied or fulfilled; for example, the craving to eat a particular type of food, or a desire to own a specific type of car. As such, these English terms

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<sup>394</sup> It is important to note here that within the Pāli Canon other debasements and impurities are also recognised as causing *dukkha* alongside *taṇhā*, such as *kilesā* and *sāsavā dhamma*. However, the scholar Rahula have stated that *taṇhā* is the "the most palpable and immediate cause" of *dukkha* and as such is widely explored as the chief cause of *dukkha* in academia. In addition, *taṇhā* is also the most reliant of these concepts with regards to Kierkegaard's philosophy, and therefore will be the central focus of my work concerning the second Noble Truth. See Rahula (2011).

<sup>395</sup> Robert Morrison, 'Three Cheers for *taṇhā*', in *Western Buddhist Review*, vol.2 (1997), <http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol2/taṇhā.html>; 9 May 2017.

<sup>396</sup> Scholar of Buddhism, Damien Keown has suggested that the translation of *taṇhā* as desire is unsatisfactory owing to the English having broader semantic range. Keown notes that within Buddhist tradition *taṇhā* normally conveys a craving that has in some way become perverted, in that it has become excessive or misdirected. The aim of *taṇhā* is usually thought of as sensory stimulation or pleasure, leading Buddhists to understand the term as signifying an unhealthy craving. Keown contends that the term desire does not denote this excessive yearning for pleasure and is thus more akin to the Buddhist concept of *chanda* which can be seen to represent positive goals for both oneself and others, for instance wanting to attain *nibbhana*. For more on this see Keown (2009).

<sup>397</sup> Gregory Kramer, *Insight Dialogue: The Interpersonal Path to Freedom* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2007), p.280.

<sup>398</sup> Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p.70.



do not adequately convey the nuanced complexity of the term *taṇhā*. To remedy this, Gethin employs the term “unquenchable thirst”, for this highlights the fact that the Buddhist term *taṇhā* is used to denote the impermanence of the material world and the human self, and thereby connotes that an individual’s cravings can never be satisfied, for they can never “hold on to the things [which they] crave”.<sup>399</sup>

In addition to introducing the general concept of *taṇhā*, the *Saccasaṃyutta* (SN 56:11) also emphasises three distinct types of *taṇhā*; namely craving for sensual desires (*kāma-taṇhā*), craving for being (*bhava-taṇhā*), and craving for non-being (*vibhava-taṇhā*). Whilst, I shall discuss how all three forms of *taṇhā* correspond to different aspects of Kierkegaard’s philosophy, it is the first of these forms—craving for sensual pleasure—that is most evident within Kierkegaard’s *Evangeliet om Lidelser*. This is because *kāma-taṇhā* refers to a person’s search for satisfaction through sensual desires and explores both how this approach can lead a person to become seized by their worldly cravings, and how it subsequently gives rise to *dukkha*. This is illustrated in the *Dhammapada* (335), where the Buddha states: “And when his cravings overcome him, his sorrows increase more and more, like the entangling creeper called *birana*”<sup>400</sup>—a statement that supports the idea that *taṇhā* gives rise to dissatisfaction. It would seem, therefore, that *kāma-taṇhā* strongly resonates with Kierkegaard’s model of human suffering, for both Kierkegaard and the Buddha maintain that a person’s preoccupation with temporal phenomena is the root cause of their dissatisfaction.

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<sup>399</sup> Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p.70.

<sup>400</sup> *The Dhammapada: The Path of Perfection*, p.83.

As I noted, the term *kāma-taṇhā* refers to cravings or attachments,<sup>401</sup> which the Pāli texts maintain stems from an inability to recognise the impermanence of reality. This is because the person in this situation has become entranced by temporal phenomena, believing that their feelings or joy, which they ascribe to the object of their desire, can lead them to a state of lasting satisfaction. This situation is also linked to the five aggregates, in so far as it involves a false perception of 'I'—of a delusion that the 'I' that is experienced is coherent and lasting, and a failure to recognise that both the desired object and the being experiencing it are subject to *anicca*. The Buddha reflects upon this situation in the *Okkantikasamyutta* (SN 25:8):

Bhikkhus, craving for forms is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise. Craving for sounds ... Craving for odours ... Craving for tastes ... Craving for tactile objects ... Craving for mental phenomena is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.<sup>402</sup>

This particular *sutta* continues to note how the situation of craving sensual pleasures diverts one from obtaining enlightenment, for it ensures that one remains focused on the material world, rather than on practising the *dhamma*.<sup>403</sup>

The *pañca nīvaraṇāni* (five hindrances) are conventionally understood as corrupting the mind, preventing one from practising *samatha* (tranquillity) meditation, and thus preventing

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<sup>401</sup>The Pāli Canon recognises *kāma-taṇhā* as arising through the arousal of the six sense organs recognised within the Pāli texts. This means that the Pāli texts distinguishes six modes of craving, with each mode having an alignment with a particular sense-object. These six modes are identified within Buddhist philosophy as the six *taṇhā-kāya*, comprising of *rūpa-taṇhā*, *sadda-taṇhā*, *gandha-taṇhā*, *rasa-taṇhā*, *phoṭṭhabba-taṇhā* and *dhamma-taṇhā*.

<sup>402</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1006.

<sup>403</sup> This is shown by the inclusion of *kāmacchanda* as the first of the *pañca nīvaraṇāni* (five hindrances). The concept of *kāmacchanda* is described by scholar of Buddhism, David Webster (2005) as one synonymous with the concept of *kāma-taṇhā*, owing to the fact that both terms are used to denote sensory desires that cause us to form attachments to temporal phenomena.<sup>403</sup> The inclusion of sensory desires within the *pañca nīvaraṇāni* illustrates the obstreperous nature of such cravings, for, as I noted earlier, it identifies them as specific obstacles to the *jhānas*, thereby indicating that sensory desires prevent the attainment of *nibbāna*.

one from strengthening the mind in order to develop a state of perfect awareness. This is described by the Buddha, who proclaims that “these five hindrances are makers of blindness, causing a lack of vision, causing a lack of knowledge”.<sup>404</sup> Sensory pleasure therefore prevents a person from developing the level of concentration required to obtain the *jhānas*, by encouraging their mind to become consumed in temporal attractions (or their opposite), which in turn, prevent them from gaining mastery of their mind. By allowing one’s thoughts to be clouded by sensory pleasures, one ultimately creates a cycle of craving with each new desire. Thus, the Buddha states in the *Bojjhaṅgasamyutta* (SN46:51):

And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen sensual desire and for the increase and expansion of arisen sensual desire? There is, bhikkhus, the sign of the beautiful: frequently giving careless attention to it is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen sensual desire and for the increase and expansion of arisen sensual desire.<sup>405</sup>

This cycle is thought to fuel a person’s attachment to the temporal world, encouraging their mind to become more and more entrenched in the delusion, greed, and hatred that initiates rebirth. This is made clear in the *Catukkanipāta* (AN 4:199), where the Buddha explains that:

Bhikkhus, I will teach you about craving— the ensnarer, streaming, widespread, and sticky— by which this world has been smothered and enveloped, and by which it has become a tangled skein, a knotted ball of thread, a mass of reeds and rushes, so that it does not pass beyond the plane of misery, the bad destination.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> ‘Bojjhaṅgasamyutta’ (SN 46:40), in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1593.

<sup>405</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1597.

<sup>406</sup> *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, p.586.

This passage clearly alludes to what the Venerable Sucitto Bhikkhu (2007) refers to as a desire to direct one's focus inward.<sup>407</sup> It is important to note that the term inward is not used here in a similar manner to Kierkegaard's use of the term that I explored earlier. Thus, while Kierkegaard advocates 'inwardness' in order to denote the importance of self-reflection in overcoming temporal concerns, the Buddhist use of the term, signifies the state wherein a person has become consumed with sensual cravings that direct their attention towards themselves and their selfish desires. *Kāma-taṇhā*, for Sucitto, indicates a problematic preoccupation with inwardness; it is, he says, an internal "gnawing",<sup>408</sup> or internal absorption that leads a person to become obsessed with the quest to find whatever it is they believe is missing from their lives, in a mistaken attempt to bring relief from their constant yearnings.

*Kāma-taṇhā*, is linked to the existential notion of lack. For it denotes the realisation of an absence within one's life: a potential state that can be actualized and brought into being through one's own choices directed towards a specific goal. However, while existential philosophy tends not to consider this process an inherently negative experience, both Kierkegaard and Buddhist philosophy advocate that such a preoccupation with the temporal world is existentially harmful, for it forces the mind to become preoccupied—and essentially 'devoured'—by temporal experiences that ultimately prevent a person from mastering their mind, and preventing them from "realizing the wisdom that goes beyond desire".<sup>409</sup> Within both Kierkegaard's philosophy and the teachings found within the Pāli texts, sensory desire is seen as an existential obstacle that prevents the individual from recognising the

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<sup>407</sup> Venerable Sucitto Bhikkhu, 'Chapter 6: The Second Noble Truth: Getting Burned', in *The Dawn of the Dhamma: Illuminations from the Buddha's First Discourse* (2007), <http://www.cittaviveka.org/files/books/dawn/dawn06.htm>, 17 June 2017.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

limitations of the world, which, in turn, inhibits them from striving to move beyond such limitations. Both systems regard sensory desire as self-defeating, as it limits human potential, and confines humans to the material features of the temporal world.

The Buddhist understanding of *kāma-taṇhā*, as the situation of remaining confined by the limitations of the temporal world is a major theme within the *Aggañña Sutta* (DN 27:12).

Here, the Buddha proclaims that:

Then some being of a greedy nature said: "I say, what can this be?" and tasted the savoury earth on its finger. In so doing, it became taken with the flavour, and craving arose in it. Then other beings, taking their cue from that one, also tasted the stuff with their fingers. They too were taken with the flavour, and craving arose in them. So they set to with their hands, breaking off pieces of the stuff in order to eat it. And the result of this was that their self-luminance disappeared.<sup>410</sup>

This passage is significant in its description of the problems of attachment to the temporal world, and its consequences—which includes an inability to obtain enlightenment, of becoming bound to the cycle of *saṃsāra* — and also in the violation that occurs when one is absorbed by a state of craving, which leads to problematic *kammaic* repercussions. *Kāma-taṇhā* is seen here as a motivation of problematic thoughts and actions, by encouraging one to participate in worldly pursuits that ensure one remains within the cycle of rebirth. The process through which *kāma-taṇhā* binds one to the world is complex. Anālayo (2009) has attempted to outline it. By emphasising its associations with feelings of “delight and passion” (*nandi-ragā-sahagatā*),<sup>411</sup> Anālayo argues that engagement with desired material

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<sup>410</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, p.410.

<sup>411</sup> Bhikkhu Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation – Excursions into the Thought-world of the Pāli Discourses* (1) (New York: The Buddhist Association, 2009), p.19.

objects or sensory phenomena, gives rise to momentary feelings of joy. These joyful or pleasant feelings (*vedanā*) ultimately encourage attachment to the source of these feelings. As the desired object stimulates *rāgānusaya* (feelings of sensuous greed), it initiates a ‘clinging’ sensation (*upādāna*), that causes desire to remain in the continuous state of pleasure ascribed to the object. However, due to the true nature of reality, this feeling of elation cannot last, and, as we have also seen in relation to Kierkegaard’s model, the person will soon become dissatisfied.

The temporal nature of the happiness a person feels when they first experience the source of their *kāma-taṇhā*, results in further cravings, as they desire to experience the temporal satisfaction over and over again. According to Anālayo, this scenario instigates a series of dalliances, whereby a person flits between different fixations in an attempt to find lasting satisfaction. This tendency to pursue an array of material pleasures is referred to in the *Samyutta Nikāya* as *tatra tatrābhinandinī* (the-there-and-there dalliance).<sup>412</sup> The Theravāda commentator Buddhaghosa describes how *kāma-taṇhā* leads a person to flutter from interest to interest: they first become consumed, albeit it briefly, by a specific sensory experience, before their enthusiasm for that experience starts to wane, and subsequently impels them to seek out another interest.<sup>413</sup> The scholar of Buddhism, Moti Lal Pandit (1993) compares the experience of *tatra tatrābhinandinī* to a butterfly that flutters between different plants in a garden, briefly delighting in each, but never settling on one.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Moti Lal Pandit, *Being as Becoming: Studies in Early Buddhism* (Delhi: Intercultural Publications Private Limited, 1993), p.266.

<sup>413</sup> Buddhaghosa, *The Dispeller of Delusion (Sammohavinodanī) Part 1: Translated From the Pāli by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli: Revised for Publication by L. S. Cousins, Nyanaponika Mahāthera and C. M. M. Shaw* (Oxford: Pāli Text Society, 1996), p.132.

<sup>414</sup> Pandit, *Being as Becoming: Studies in Early Buddhism*, p.266.

According to Anālayo, it is this human tendency continually to seek gratification (*assāda*) in different pleasures, whilst never finding lasting satisfaction in any of them, that gives rise to our human thirst for temporal pleasures.<sup>415</sup> This idea is expressed in several distinct similes throughout the *Samyutta Nikāya*, such as, for instance in the *Nidānasamyutta* (SN 12:52), the Buddha comparison of a person's cravings with a great fire, to which excess fuel is continually added to make it burn indefinitely.<sup>416</sup> Similarly, within the *Nidānasamyutta* (SN 12:55-57), the Buddha compares *kāma-taṇhā* with the growth of a sapling, explaining that for the sapling to thrive it must be cared for, and provided with nourishment.<sup>417</sup> These teachings illustrate how a person's perception of gratification enables the development of their *kāma-taṇhā*, for, as with the fire and the sapling, *kāma-taṇhā* requires fuel in order to maintain its hold on the individual. *Kāma-taṇhā* thus requires that one remains focused on the material world, forever on the lookout for things that can be clung to for gratification. This, in turn, fuels *dukkha*, preventing one from finding lasting satisfaction.

There is further clarification about the relationship between *taṇhā* and *dukkha* in the doctrine of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*)—a doctrine that asserts all *dharmas* (things)<sup>418</sup> are dependent on other *dharmas* for their existence.<sup>419</sup> The conception that underpins *pratītyasamutpāda* is an ontological principle that seeks to clarify the nature of existence by establishing the conditions required for things to come into

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<sup>415</sup> Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, p.19.

<sup>416</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, pp.589-590.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid*, pp.591-592.

<sup>418</sup> Within Theravāda Buddhism *dharmas* are regarded as the psychophysical *building blocks* of the temporal world. The *Abhidhamma* produced a list of eight-two classes of *dharmas*, which can combine together to create the phenomena that consists and exists within the temporal world. Duly they are often compared to atoms or elements, reinforcing the conception that they are the *irreducible building blocks of reality*. For more on this see Forrest E. Baird (2006).

<sup>419</sup> This is made clear by Bhikkhu Bodhi in his notes of the translation of the *Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta* (MN 38), which explains that: "That is when this is; that arises with the arising of this." And the principle of cessation: "That is not when this is not; that ceases with the cessation of this". For more information see Bhikkhu Bodhi (2009).

being.<sup>420</sup> It asserts that nothing exists independently in and of itself (except for *nibbāna*), for all things are contingent and transient on other things that precede them.

*Pratītyasamutpāda* underpins the Buddhist belief that casualty is the basis of all existence—a view that is in contradistinction to the idea of a creator God. It should be noted here that *pratītyasamutpāda* seeks to explain the existence of all states and all things, and this includes not only physical matter, but human life, thoughts, and concepts. It is in this context, then, that we can make sense of the important belief in Buddhism that all phenomena lack substance or permanence in and of themselves. *Pratītyasamutpāda*, as scholar of Buddhism, Peter Harvey (1990) explains, is thus:

The Buddhist notion that all apparently substantial entities within the world are in fact wrongly perceived. We live under the illusion that terms such as 'I', self, mountain, tree, etc. denote permanent and stable things. The doctrine teaches this is not so.<sup>421</sup>

Subsequently, *pratītyasamutpāda* can be regarded as emphasising the notions of *anicca* and *anattā* by confirming the emptiness of all temporal beings and experiences.

While the doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda* may seem to be in direct contrast to Kierkegaard's perception of reality due to its theological groundings, further analysis of the doctrine reveals intriguing points of parallel between them. Indeed, although Kierkegaard insists that God is creator of all things, he nevertheless asserts that the temporal world is, in comparison to God, an inferior to distraction from the spiritual aspects of existence. In view of this, it becomes clear that Kierkegaard's position is similar to the teaching of

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<sup>420</sup> Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.54-55.

<sup>421</sup> Harvey, *Buddhism* (London: Continuum, 2001), p.242.



*pratītyasamutpāda*, in so far as Kierkegaard regards the temporal world as devoid of substance, lacking both permanence and purpose, and wholly contingent on God for its coming into being.<sup>422</sup> The existence of the temporal world is subsequently characterised by Kierkegaard as seductive lure for humanity that inhibits their capacity for forming a meaningful relationship with God. While there are clear differences between the two conceptions—not least, the fact that Kierkegaard regards human beings as comprising, in part, an eternal essence—I contend that there are significant agreements between the two. Namely, that both systems of thought regard the material world as inferior to the spiritual, as it lacks inherent value, and consists of contingent phenomena that are impermanent and alluring, and which give rise to suffering if they are not recognised as such.

The doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda* is applied to the twelve *nidānas* (causes, motivations or links)—a Buddhist teaching that seeks to explain the relationships between the twelve connected phenomena that underpin a person’s repeated rebirths within the cycle of *saṃsāra*, and, moreover, a person’s ensuing experiences of *dukkha*. In this way, the twelve *nidānas* describe the series of causes that give rise to rebirth, which complement the doctrines of *anicca* and *anattā*. This is significant to our discussion because *taṇhā* is recognised as the eighth of the twelve *nidānas*, which means that *taṇhā* facilitates a person’s attachment or binding to the cycle of rebirth. *Taṇhā* therefore arises out of a person’s capacity to experience sensory phenomena—developing from *vedanā*—and thereby stems from their ability to experience the six forms of sensory objects. Sucitto Bhikkhu contends that *vedanā* gives rise to *taṇhā* through a distortion of the mind’s values

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<sup>422</sup> Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard*, p.190.

(*saññā*),<sup>423</sup> a distortion that causes the mind to associate powerful emotional pleasures with its sensory experiences. As such, *taṇhā* is the result of confused and distorted perceptions of the world that lead a person to value pleasant sensations and compel them to seek out repeated experiences of these sensations. In this way, *vedanā* can be seen to give way to *taṇhā* as a person desires the pleasures they derive from sensory phenomena. *Taṇhā*, as one of the twelve *nidānas*, is regarded as the cause of a person's identification with the temporal world, and the means by which their experiences and perceptions are structured in such a way that confuses and deludes them into believing in the inherent and lasting value of sensual pleasures. *Taṇhā* therefore prevents a person from recognising the impermanence of temporal phenomena (including their own self) and establishes a false sense of reality. *Taṇhā* ensures that a person remains fixated on temporal phenomena, and unable to recognise that its fleeting nature will lead to further experiences of *dukkha*.<sup>424</sup> In this way, when the unenlightened mind becomes subject to *taṇhā*, it, too, becomes susceptible to the next *nidānas* in line—that of *upādāna* (craving). *Upādāna*, while similar in nature to *taṇhā*, is a state in which a person is completely overcome with cravings for the sensory world, and so much so that an inability to acquire the object of desire, leads them to a state of despair, for the mind becomes completely lost within the confines of the temporal world. This approach to life leads to the generating of *kamma*, as cravings delude the mind to produce the *kammic* footprint, which gives rise to further *nidānas* that ensures

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<sup>423</sup> Venerable Sucitto Bhikkhu, 'Chapter 6: The Second Noble Truth: Getting Burned', in *The Dawn of the Dhamma: Illuminations from the Buddha's First Discourse* (2007), <http://www.cittaviveka.org/files/books/dawn/dawn06.htm>, last accessed 17 June 2017.

<sup>424</sup> Kenneth K. Inada, 'The Range of Buddhist Ontology.' in *Philosophy East and West* vol.38, no.3 (1988), pp.262-264.

one's rebirth.<sup>425</sup> This process is made clear in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1:3.71) where the Buddha proclaims that:

[T]hey experience these feelings by repeated contact through the six sense-bases; feeling conditions craving; craving conditions clinging; clinging conditions becoming; becoming conditions birth; birth conditions aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, sadness and distress.<sup>426</sup>

As part of the twelve *nidānas*, *taṇhā* is regarded as a primary cause of rebirth, and as part of the mechanics that underpins one's continuation in the cycle of *saṃsāra*, and the subsequent *dukkha* that one subsequently endures.

It is evident that *taṇhā* prevents the person from obtaining enlightenment, as it keeps them bound to *saṃsāra*. This notion has clear similarities to Kierkegaard's belief that the individual's preoccupation with the material world prevents them from 'turning inward' and discovering their potential to establish a relationship with God.<sup>427</sup> As I discussed earlier, Kierkegaard maintains that desire for sensory pleasures is the foundation of human suffering, and lasting happiness cannot be found in objects or experiences that are transitory in nature. Equally, he maintains that humans frequently become completely overwhelmed by their desire for temporal pleasures, often sacrificing their relationship with God in order to realise the fulfilment of their earthly desires. According to Kierkegaard, humans allow themselves to become deceived by the temporal world, for they tend to delude themselves into believing that the object of their current desire will provide them

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<sup>425</sup> Venerable Sucitto Bhikkhu, 'Chapter 6: The Second Noble Truth: Getting Burned', in *The Dawn of the Dhamma: Illuminations from the Buddha's First Discourse* (2007), <http://www.cittaviveka.org/files/books/dawn/dawn06.htm>, last accessed 17 June 2017.

<sup>426</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, p.89.

<sup>427</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.228.

with lasting satisfaction. In terms similar to the second Noble Truth, Kierkegaard maintains that temporal phenomena ultimately lead to dissatisfaction, and that earthly pleasures eventually disband as and when a person loses interest in them. These ideas strongly resemble both *samudaya*—in so far as *samudaya* connotes the human tendency to crave sensual pleasures—and also *vipariṇāma-dukkha*, in so far as Kierkegaard perceives suffering arises, in part, from the transitory nature of things.<sup>428</sup> A further point of comparison is also evident, in that both the philosophy of Kierkegaard and teachings of the Pāli texts regard the material world as a hindrance to liberation—indeed, as I shall discuss later in this chapter (see pages 211-240) , both Kierkegaard and the Pāli texts maintain that it is possible to liberate oneself from the limitations of the temporal world. Buddhism explores this through the Third Noble Truth, while Kierkegaard examines it through his notion of eternity. Although I will explore this particular point of comparison in detail later, it is already becoming apparent that both systems of thought recognise the temporal world as something from which liberation is needed on the basis that humans tend to become engrossed in material pleasures, and in the process, fail to recognise that they are the source of their own liberation, and have the ability to liberate themselves.<sup>429</sup> Both systems of thought likewise acknowledge that a person’s failure to recognise this vital point is indicative of the fact that this person has become fixated to, or bonded to, the temporal world, and thereby inflicts upon themselves the suffering they are unable to overcome.

I have already explained that Kierkegaard’s recognition of sensual desire as the origins of human suffering resonates with the Pāli teachings of *samudaya*—a concept that maintains that the cause of *dukkha* is often found in the human desire. Both systems of thought duly

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid, p.310.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid, p.228.

maintain that desire for temporal pleasures is an obstacle to self-overcoming, one that prevents a person from recognising that they can liberate themselves from the dissatisfaction that plague their existence. I shall now develop this comparison by examining Kierkegaard's claims concerning the inhibiting nature of sensual desire. We shall see that his claims are not exclusive to *Evangeliet om Lidelser* [The Gospel of Sufferings] but are apparent in his wider works—a fact that confirms the centrality of this idea to Kierkegaard's philosophy. By employing Kierkegaard's wider literature—in particularly *Enten – Eller* [Either/Or], I intend to elaborate on the fruitful comparisons between *taṇhā* and Kierkegaard's work—notably, by establishing additional parallels between Kierkegaard's concepts of the aesthetic and ethical modes of existence, and the Buddhist understanding of *vibhava-taṇhā* (see pages 198-201) and *bhava-taṇhā* (see pages 202-219).

### The Aesthetic

As has been discussed, the relationship between Kierkegaard's philosophy and the Buddhist concept of *taṇhā* is not exclusive to Kierkegaard's account in *Evangeliet om Lidelser*, for Kierkegaard discusses the limitations of sensual desire throughout his writings. For instance, his publication *Den nuværende alder* [The Present Age] (1846), takes sensual desire as its predominant theme, and argues that humans are becoming increasingly motivated by self-interest, and are increasingly valuing materialistic pleasures above spiritual virtues.<sup>430</sup> Kierkegaard's concern for humanity's disregard for the sacred aspects of life, and its increasing tendency to value worldly pursuits above devotional activities, is expressed consistently throughout his works, and in itself signifies just how big a threat he considered

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<sup>430</sup> In this regard, Kierkegaard makes the following satirical comment: "More and more people renounce the quiet and modest tasks of life, that are so important and pleasing to God, in order to achieve something greater"; for more on this see Kierkegaard (1962).

sensual pleasures to be to the practice of authentic Christianity. However, of all his publications, it is the two volumes entitled *Enten – Eller* published in 1843 where Kierkegaard's perception of desire and its effect on human suffering are expounded in greatest depth. *Enten – Eller* presents a complex interpretation of desire, which is not exclusively rooted in the craving for sensory pleasures, but also recognises its roots in the craving for the continuation of existence and also in complete annihilation. *Enten – Eller* provides further parallels with the Buddhist notion of *taṇhā* in its recognition of the human capacity for craving existence and extinction—a capacity that corresponds to the Buddhist notions of *bhava-taṇhā* and *vibhava-taṇhā*, alongside *kāma-taṇhā*. Given these parallels, I will examine some of the central themes of *Enten – Eller*, in order to establish the different ways that desire is depicted. This will enable me to develop my discussion concerning the relationship between Kierkegaard's philosophy and the concept of *taṇhā*, as I will demonstrate exactly how both systems of thought assert that sensual desires are obstructive forces that overwhelm the mind and prevents it from perceiving the true nature of reality.

Kierkegaard wrote *Enten – Eller* to outline two distinct approaches to life that were, as he saw it, prevalent in Danish society during his lifetime. The two volumes that comprise the text are often regarded as a theory of human development that examines how human consciousness can progress from a hedonistic approach to life—characterised by Kierkegaard as the aesthetic mode of existence—to a more rational and measured mode of life that is governed by ethical values, which arise out of the maturation of a person's conscience. Such interpretations of the text, however, can oversimplify Kierkegaard's thinking, for Kierkegaard did not believe that progression from the aesthetic to the ethical stage in life was a natural transition. Indeed, if an aesthetic person is to adopt an ethical

outlook, they need first to recognise themselves as a Self (*Ånd*), which is to say, as a being of both finite and infinite capabilities. But, according to Kierkegaard, the aesthetic person may not be able to realise their infinite capacity, and, consequently, may not be able to develop an ethical outlook.

I contend that *Enten – Eller* is best understood as a debate between two of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors, with the two volumes seeking to justify—one after the other—the two respective approaches to life represented by these fictional characters. Thus, the first volume of *Enten – Eller* focuses exclusively on the aesthetic life view, and is written by an unnamed fictitious author—often dubbed by scholars and commentators as A—who lives his life within the aesthetic sphere. This part of *Enten – Eller* explores the joys of the temporary world using poetic imagery, and with allusions to the joys of sexual seduction and music. The second volume advances the ethical life view and is written by a fictional ethicist called Judge William. This second volume of the text is more argumentative than the first and concerns itself with a critique of the aesthetic mode of life, in an attempt to reveal the virtues of moral responsibility and critical reflection—those values that characterise an ethical life. Together, both volumes of *Enten – Eller* present a conflicting approach (and *either—or* approach) to life, which ultimately seeks to reveal how desire can be expressed in a variety of forms, and, moreover, how these various forms completely transform a person's approach to life.

The first volume of *Enten – Eller* presents the aesthetic approach to life, with A presenting an individualistic and subjective approach to life, where the sole focus of the individual's existence is to exact pleasure for its own sake. Kierkegaard's conception of the aesthetic is considered by Kierkegaardian scholar, Jon Stewart (2015) to be a satire of German

Romanticism, with its allusion to an array of medieval characters as diverse as Don Juan, Ahasuerus, and Faust.<sup>431</sup> This mode of existence is characterised by a need for immediate satisfaction of sensory desires. In the words of philosopher George Leone (2014), the aesthete lives for “the intensity of erotic, aesthetic arousal”.<sup>432</sup> The aesthete is therefore governed by their temporal desires, and place material pleasure above all other pursuits, including spiritual development. This is reinforced in the writings of Judge William in the second volume, when he argues, for instance, that “the popular expression [for the aesthetic life-view] heard in all ages and from various stages is this: One must enjoy life”.<sup>433</sup> This assessment of the aesthetic life, firmly establishes the concerns of the aesthete are rooted in his or her temporal existence, with their priorities lying firmly in their external existence, rather than an inner spiritual life. The aesthete is accused by Judge William of equating pleasure with meaning, and for making their ultimate aspiration in life one of gratification through sensory experience. The aesthete therefore allows themselves to be directed and governed by external factors, including uncertain, chance events that are beyond their control. If chance is seen to favour them, the aesthete will experience feelings of elation, but because this cannot be guaranteed, the aesthete can feel rejected and in a state of despair.

A’s approach to life can be characterised as chaotic, as they have no real control over their fate. This leads Judge William to condemn A, criticising A’s life for being too impulsive and experimental. The Judge recognises that the aesthete, by grasping after material pleasures,

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<sup>431</sup> Jon Stewart, *Søren Kierkegaard: Subjectivity, Irony, & the Crisis of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.117.

<sup>432</sup> George Leone, *Kierkegaard’s Existentialism: The Theological Self and the Existential Self* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2014), p.14.

<sup>433</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (eds & trans) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.179.



has allowed their mind to become unsettled, and has prevented it from making decisions and appropriate choices. Consequently, the aesthete passes through life passively, allowing their cravings for pleasure to dictate every action; the Judge therefore asserts: “Here [...] it is still not a matter of a choice in the stricter sense, for the person who lives aesthetically does not choose”.<sup>434</sup> I will examine the aspect of choice later in this chapter (see pages 202-219), but I want to note here the fact that the Judge's criticisms of the aesthetic life reflect the Buddhist approach to *kāma-taṇhā*, in so far as both recognise that a preoccupation with sensory pleasure impacts on a person's ability to control the mind. As I have discussed, *kāma-taṇhā* is associated with the five fetter, and is therefore associated with the defilement of mind—a scenario that prevents one from acquiring meditative tranquillity. Therefore, in similar respect to the aesthete's preoccupation with sensory pleasures, *kāma-taṇhā* ensures a person remains focused on temporal phenomena, and firmly distracted from their potential to overcome the suffering caused by this approach to life.

The aesthetic sphere of existence receives further criticism from Judge William because the aesthete recognises themselves exclusively in terms of their senses. By establishing an identity based on their immediate experiences of the world—by, for instance, establishing their identity in light of their latest fixation and attachment—the aesthete grounds themselves exclusively in finite terms. Judge William asserts:

But the person who says that he wants to enjoy life always posits a condition that either lies outside the individual or is within the individual in such a way that it is not there by virtue of the individual himself.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>434</sup>Ibid, p.168.

<sup>435</sup>Ibid, p.180.

This passage is significant as it reveals that the aesthete has no conception of themselves as an individual and recognising themselves only through their relationships with their desired objects or experiences. This is made clear when Judge William criticises the aesthete as follows:

You love the accidental. A smile from a pretty girl in an interesting situation, a stolen glance, that is what you are hunting for, that is a motif for your aimless fantasy. You who always pride yourself on being an observer must, in return, put up with becoming an object of observation. Ah, you are a strange fellow, one moment a child, the next an old man; one moment you are thinking most earnestly about the most important scholarly problems, how you will devote your life to them, and the next you are a lovesick fool. But you are a long way from marriage.<sup>436</sup>

The identity of the aesthete is fluid; it transforms to conform to their latest fantasy. For example, if the aesthete were fixated on sexual gratification, they understand themselves exclusively as a seducer, with all their energies now focused on finding a lover to ensure they experience the required gratification. In this way, the aesthete negates their infinite capacities by refusing to recognise their capacity to reflect on their actions, and to overcome their immediate impulses. They are therefore unable to recognise themselves in the Kierkegaardian Spirit, and unable, therefore, of harnessing their freedom to choose the direction that their life takes.

It is interesting to note that both Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhist thought regard sensual desire as a product of ignorance that prevents a person from realising their true

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid, pp.7-8.

nature.<sup>437</sup> As was noted earlier (see pages 174-175), the doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda* confirms that nothing can come into being independently of anything else, so that *taṇhā* is contingent on the emergence of specific factors for its own emergence—that is to say, from *vedanā* (feeling or sensation), and thus from the five aggregates. Asanga Tilakaratne (2012), who examines these relationships, concludes that *taṇhā* is derived from the delusions a person has of their possession of a permanent ontological state. This delusion, Tilakaratne notes, is combined with sensual pleasures, and thereby misleads a person into the belief that they can acquire continued satisfaction through further exposure to the source of their perceived pleasure, leading to the onset of craving and attachment.<sup>438</sup> In this way, Tilakaratne presents a similar conception of human pleasure to Kierkegaard’s model of the aesthete, for in both it is evident that the person, who allows themselves to become consumed with temporal pleasure remains deceived, and unable to recognise their capacity for liberation. Both Kierkegaard and Buddhism therefore regard desire as a product of ignorance (or *avijjā*), which, in turn, results in an overwhelming preoccupation with temporal pursuits—a preoccupation that inevitably leads to suffering or despair.

Kierkegaard’s notion of an aesthetic life is exemplified by an inability to commit, and with fleeting interests; indeed, as A confesses: “My time I divide as follows: the one half I sleep; the other half I dream”.<sup>439</sup> A recognises that they are not active within society, and that they subsequently fail to conform to the duties and responsibilities that society would otherwise

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<sup>437</sup> One could argue, however, that this claim is somewhat tenuous, due to the fact that Kierkegaard’s maintains that a person’s true identity is rooted in an eternal aspect that survives death—a belief that is in contrast with the Buddha’s concept of *anattā*.

<sup>438</sup> Tilakaratne, *Theravada Buddhism: The View of The Elders*, pp.42-43.

<sup>439</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part I*, Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (eds & trans) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.28.

impress upon them; A is, as they readily admit, half asleep, choosing their 'dreams' or desires above all else.

A's use of the term 'dream' evokes the fleeting nature of their desires, for, like a dream, their desires lack permanence or substance, existing briefly before they are replaced by the next fantasy. The aesthete can value a person, object, or experience for the brief time in which it provides him or her with pleasure. The aesthete craves the emotional intensity that arises when new phenomena are experienced for the first time—such as the excitement that arises in the initial stages of a relationship, or the excitement of undertaking a new leisure activity for the first time. It is the novelty of a situation that sparks their interest. Soon, after the original elation has begun to diminish, the aesthete loses interest in the person, object or experience, and starts to look elsewhere for the next fascination to enable them to sustain the same level of emotional intensity. Kierkegaardian scholar, María G. Amilburu (2016) captures this idea well: “[t]he aesthetic existence is thus an inconsistent kind of phenomenon which wafts here and there in an evanescent world”.<sup>440</sup> The aesthete becomes impervious to the simple pleasures of everyday life, constantly needing to discover enthralling ones. But he or she is ultimately consumed by their material desires. This is made evident by Kierkegaard when he distinguishes between the three stages of erotic experience.

The erotic stages, while focused primarily on the aesthete's erotic desires, are present in the aesthete more generally ultimately, as they express the dynamics that underpin how he or she becomes fixated on the object of their current obsession. Erotic desires, according to

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<sup>440</sup> María G. Amilburu, 'Understanding Human Nature: Examples from Philosophy and the Arts', paper presented *Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, Boston, Massachusetts, August 1998. Paper retrieved from: <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Anth/AnthAmil.htm>, last accessed 19 June 2017.

Kierkegaard are a form of sensual craving, which means that erotic desires, although directed towards sexual gratification, engage the individual's consciousness in much the same way as any other temporal desire.

The first erotic stage is akin to a dream that lacks a specific goal or focus, and yet still has the power to initiate an intense emotional response within the dreamer—it is akin, therefore, to a dream one has when one is on a quest, but uncertain what the goal of the quest is.<sup>441</sup> In this first stage, Kierkegaard suggests that desire awakens in the aesthete without a specific object to which it is attached. It is an unspecified craving, which leads to feelings of melancholy, as it highlights a current dissatisfaction with life, but with no means of satisfaction. This melancholy sparks the second erotic stage. Here the aesthete begins to feel desires that he or she recognises as a possible means to satisfy themselves, and thereby overcome their melancholic dissatisfaction. Thus, the second stage involves the individual becoming aware of a specific object or person of their desire. In this stage, the desired object or person is presented as an enticement, appealing to the individual's hunger for new pleasures.

The third and final erotic stage is described by Kierkegaard as the stage where the aesthete undertakes the actions of “desiring”<sup>442</sup> (*ønsker*). Here the aesthete becomes aware of an absence or lack within their lives and recognises that they are no longer satisfied in their current pursuit; they subsequently begin to imagine what it would be like to possess their latest object of desire, and to weigh up the potential pleasures it could bring. As part of this process, the aesthete becomes open to the possibility of self-awareness, and the existential

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<sup>441</sup> See: Leone, *Kierkegaard's Existentialism: The Theological Self and the Existential Self* (2014).

<sup>442</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part I*, p.86.

gap between their current state of longing and their idealised state, in which they possess their object of desire. This is significant, as it highlights the possibility for existential growth. In other words, when the aesthete becomes aware that they have the capacity to progress from their current state to an idealised one, they could be construed as beginning to recognise the *infinite* aspect of their nature. However, while Kierkegaard recognises that the aesthete possesses the potential to unlock their infinite capabilities and progress from the aesthetic mode of existence to other modes, he maintains that the aesthete is unlikely to do so, because he or she is too fixated on their desires, and led too easily by materialistic impulses, to recognise this aspect of themselves.

Kierkegaard's three erotic stages can be interpreted as a process of development from an impersonal desire to a personal desire—a process that then becomes ingrained as one's motivation for acting within the world, for desire remains the motivational factor that ensures the aesthete remains active. Desire gives the aesthete something to aspire towards and establishes for him or her a sense of purpose. Conversely, desire also initiates suffering and *angest* within the life of the aesthete, for their fleeting interests never provide them with lasting satisfaction but leads them instead to feelings of despair and worthlessness. Judge William explains how the aesthete becomes aware of their feeling of despair when they either cannot attain their current object of desire or when their current enthusiasm for their latest obsession is exhausted.<sup>443</sup> Here the aesthete becomes tormented by feelings of loss and hopelessness and recognises their lives as empty and devoid of meaning. These feelings stem from the aesthete's inability to establish a purpose for themselves—to *choose* their own path—for they are always governed by their erratic impulses, rather than their

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<sup>443</sup>Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.192.

reasoned convictions. This inability to create meaning for themselves ensures that the aesthete is unable to overcome their emptiness and despair, meaning they are ensnared in this psychological turmoil until they become distracted by a new obsession. The depths of the aesthete's despair is revealed by A, who confesses that their “depression is the most faithful mistress I have known - no wonder, then, that I return the love”.<sup>444</sup> Here, A clearly illustrates the continuous plight of his or her despair—a despair that the aesthete is forced to endure at the end of each sensory dalliance, when they are again lost for meaning, and forced to confront the emptiness of their existence.

This feeling of emptiness forms the basis of the Judge’s criticism of the aesthetic way of life. Judge William continually maintains throughout the second volume of *Enten – Eller* that the aesthete’s need for external distractions is a way to divert their attention from the inner turmoil of their lives, and thereby indicates that temporal, material phenomena cannot provide real meaning and purpose to a person’s life, but—as illustrated in the life of the aesthete—provides mere distractions to the emptiness that defines the temporal world. Consequently, the Judge maintains that the despair experienced by an aesthete is not a product of their own inability to require a specific object or a result of their diminishing interest in their latest preoccupation, but, rather, that the aesthete has been in a state of despair all along and has simply masked this by embracing temporal distractions. This idea is also alluded to by A, who discloses their feelings thus:

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<sup>444</sup>Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part I*, p.20.

“[I have] never been joyful, and yet it has always seemed as if joy were my constant companion, as if the buoyant jinn of joy danced around me, invisible to others but not to me, whose eyes shone with delight”.<sup>445</sup>

This lament exposes the vulnerability of the aesthete, illuminating how, in moments of despair, he or she recognises the transient nature of sensory pleasures, and realises that temporal phenomena provide merely the illusion of satisfaction. The temporal world is used by the aesthete to shield themselves from the truth of their emptiness, enabling them to avoid the meaninglessness of their lives, and, moreover, to help them to repress their feelings of despair. The Judge notes:

Let us now see why they despaired. Because they discovered that they had built their lives on something transient? But is that a reason for despair; has an essential change taken place in that on which they built their lives? Is it an essential change in the transitory that it manifests itself as transitory, or is it not rather something accidental and inessential about it that it does not manifest itself this way? Nothing new has supervened that could cause a change. Consequently, when they despair, the basis of it must be that they were in despair beforehand. The difference is only that they did not know it.<sup>446</sup>

The aesthete’s mantra, according to the Judge, is that one must “enjoy life”.<sup>447</sup> But this, according to the Judge, is simply a sort of defence mechanism: a means for self-preservation that enables the aesthete to continue to function within the world, by keeping away the overwhelming feelings of emptiness. Kierkegaardian scholar, Michelle Kosch (2006), notes

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<sup>445</sup> Ibid, p.40.

<sup>446</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.192.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid, p.183.



that the aesthete's inability to harness their infinite capabilities ensures they remain a spectator in life, rather than a participant in it.<sup>448</sup> In this respect, the aesthete remains a prisoner, held captive by their feelings of despair and their sensuous impulses in continuous battle. The Judge intimates this sense of imprisonment when he compares the aesthete's feelings to how "a chess man must feel when the opponent says of it: that piece cannot be moved".<sup>449</sup> The aesthete remains stuck in the process of becoming a Self, unable to find meaning for themselves, remaining trapped within the finite aspect of being.

The psychological torment experienced by the aesthete is explored in the work of Kierkegaardian scholar, Louis Mackay (1971), who argues that the aesthete remains in a psychological battle, progressing from moments of deep despair to periods of great elation (when distracted by temporal phenomena). This continuous internal struggle ensures that the aesthete always remains in a state of instability, never experiencing a prolonged period of psychological harmony. Mackay takes a gloomy stance on the aesthete's condition, by remarking that "death is the greatest happiness"<sup>450</sup> for the aesthete. This gloomy outlook is supported by a passage concerning the nature of despair in Kierkegaard's *Sygdommen til Døden* [*Sickness Unto Death*] (1849) where Kierkegaard asserts that "in despairing over something, [the aesthete] really despaired over himself, and now he wants to get rid of himself".<sup>451</sup> This reinforces the idea that despair, for Kierkegaard, is characterised as a complete loss of meaning and hope, where one can feel that the only means of escape is death. Mackay's remark therefore highlights the fact that the aesthete's existence is plagued by a psychological struggle that can only be overcome in one of two ways. The first

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<sup>448</sup> Michelle Kosch, "Despair' in Kierkegaard's Either/Or' in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol.44, no.1 (2006), p.92.

<sup>449</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.26.

<sup>450</sup> Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p.14.

<sup>451</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, p.19.

is for the aesthete to recognise their capacity to harness their infinite capacities, and thereby progress from their mode of life to the ethical mode of existence. The second is simply to wait for death and remain hopeful that it will bring an end to their psychological conflict.

Both Robert Perkins (2006) and Keith Hoeller (1992) argue that the intensity of living a life of despair leads the aesthete to develop a preoccupation with death. Hoeller characterises the aesthete as one “who, though fascinated with death, is afraid to choose life”.<sup>452</sup> The aesthete both longs for death due to their inability to create a meaningful existence, and fears death due to the pain and stigma associated with suicide. In *Sygdommen til Døden*<sup>453</sup> Kierkegaard discusses despair as a sickness: and claims that to be “saved from this sickness is an impossibility, because the sickness and its torment—and the death—are precisely this inability to die”.<sup>454</sup> This confirms that, for Kierkegaard, the despair that he associates with the aesthetic mode of existence establishes death as an attractive *and* repulsive proposition to the aesthete. Death promises release from suffering but introduces fear. Thus, in moments of despair, the aesthete longs for their annihilation, in order to escape the suffering of their existence, but do not commit suicide for fear of the consequences, and their continued need for self-preservation.<sup>455</sup> Accordingly, the aesthete has a complex

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<sup>452</sup> Keith Hoeller, ‘Introduction to Existential Psychology and Psychiatry’, in *Readings in Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, Keith Hoeller (ed) (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1992), p.8.

<sup>453</sup> It should be noted here, that while issues such of suicide are not discussed at great length, Kierkegardian scholar Alistair Hannay in his essay for *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* on the role of despair within Kierkegaard philosophy notes that the presentation of despair in *Either/Or* must be understood as being related to it’s presentation in wider Kierkegardian literature. For instance, Hannay refers to a quote from the *Unscientific Post Script* where Anti Climacus’ claim that one who suffers from despair “wants to be rid of oneself”, as being explanatory of the plight of the aesthete in *Either/Or*. Therefore, while the aesthete’s longing for death, is only mentioned implicitly within *Either/Or* Kierkegaard’s wider literature enables us to draw firm conclusions concerning the aesthete’s desire to completely escape suffering through the act of dyeing. For more on this see Hannay (1998).

<sup>454</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, p.21.

<sup>455</sup> Michael Theunissen, ‘The Upbuilding in the Thought of Death. Traditional Elements, Innovative Ideas, and Unexhausted Possibilities in Kierkegaard’s Discourse “At a Graveside.”’, Translated by George Pattison’, in

relationship with death: during periods of despair they crave it, but when distracted by temporal pleasures (when, therefore, they feel their life has meaning—albeit only a temporary meaning) they are fearful of death, as a loss to the meaning they cling to.

It is clear that the aesthete is a complicated figure in Kierkegaard's philosophy, who reveals the problems of directing one's desires and attention to the temporal world, for such attachment to temporal things leads to delusion, and to dissatisfaction and *angest*. In turn, this attachment to impermanent things leads to a desire for the complete annihilation of one's existence, thereby revealing the depths of the complex emotional battle continually fought by the person living in the aesthetic mode of existence.

Kierkegaard's notion of the aesthetic life has distinct points of comparison with the Pāli texts; in particular, the Buddhist notion of *kāma-taṇhā* and *vibhava-taṇhā*. Of these two points of parallel, it is only the relationship between the aesthetic lifestyle and *kāma-taṇhā* that has received scholarly attention. The parallel has been noticed by De Silva, in *The Critique of Pleasure in Kierkegaard and Early Buddhism* (1970)—a work that concerns the similarities between Kierkegaard's philosophy and criticisms of pleasure found in early Buddhism. Although this particular work remains one of the more detailed comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism—since it is one of a small number of publications that focuses exclusively on the relationship between Kierkegaard's philosophy and Buddhism—it is, as I discussed in the literature review, limited in its scope. This is because De Silva attempts to analyse *each* of the three modes of existence proffered by Kierkegaard—his aesthetic, ethical, and religious modes of existence—and, as such, he is

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*International Kierkegaard Commentary: [vol.9] Prefaces and Writing Sampler: And, [vol.10] Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, Robert L. Perkins (ed) (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2006), p.338.

able only to examine each mode relatively briefly. De Silva's work suffers in a number of respects. In particular, it fails to explore the complexity of the Buddhist conception of *taṇhā*, applying it in a limited manner, and defining it simply as 'sensory desires'—in so doing, he fails to acknowledge the relevance of either *vibhava-taṇhā* or *bhava-taṇhā*. By approaching his study in this limited way, De Silva is unable to explore the full extent of the parallels that exist between these aspects of Kierkegaard's philosophy and Buddhist thought, presenting instead a very broadly construed comparison of the two that lacks the detail required to expose the intricacies and important nuances of the closeness of Kierkegaard's understanding of desire to that of early Buddhism.

In spite of my criticisms of De Silva's work, it nevertheless identifies some interesting similarities between the aesthetic sphere of life and *kāma-taṇhā*. He includes, for instance, an exploration of the concept of *kāma-taṇhā* (with reference to the Buddhist notion of *kāmasukhallikānuyoga*/sensual gratification), to explain how it is characterised in similar terms to the aesthetic sphere of life. *Kāma-taṇhā*, as with the aesthetic sphere, is, De Silva argues, characterised by self-indulgence, where one's judgment becomes clouded in delusion (*moha*), leading a person to value temporal pleasures above the *dhamma*.<sup>456</sup> De Silva arrives at similar conclusions to my own, by noting, for instance, that both the aesthete and the one who is consumed by *kāma-taṇhā* are governed by a pleasure-seeking desire that prioritises momentary happiness over lasting satisfaction.<sup>457</sup> Referring to the *pañca kāmāgata* (the five categories of objects which stimulate pleasure within the five physical sensory organs), De Silva asserts that both Kierkegaard's aesthete and the Buddhist notion of *kāmasukhallikānuyoga*, indicate that a person has become infatuated with sensual

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<sup>456</sup>De Silva, 'The Critique of Pleasure in Søren Kierkegaard and Early Buddhism', p.16.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid, p.13.

pleasures (*kāma-rāga*), allowing their cravings to become the overall focus of their existence. At this point in his work, there is a clear allusion to the *Kilesasamyutta* (SN 27:10)—a teaching that instructs:

Bhikkhus, desire and lust for form ... for feeling ... for perception ... for volitional formations ... for consciousness is a corruption of the mind.<sup>458</sup>

This notion is expressed again by the Buddha when he refers to objects that can be classified as *pana kāmāgunā*, which is to say: “desirable, lovely, agreeable, pleasing, sensually enticing, tantalizing”.<sup>459</sup> The Buddha here signifies that such objects give rise to *upādāna* (clinging) by arousing one’s senses and creating the illusion of satisfaction, leading a person to believe these objects are capable of ensuring lasting happiness.

Despite this initial confidence in the ability of sensory objects providing lasting pleasure, De Silva maintains that the person who is controlled by *kāma-taṇhā* will find—just as the aesthete finds— that the original feeling of satisfaction quickly begins to wane, inciting their craving for variety and change.<sup>460</sup> As I discussed earlier in this chapter, *kāma-taṇhā* fails to provide a lasting satisfaction, forcing a person to search for new sensations or phenomena to allow them to feel, once again, the momentary gratification of encountering a new area of fascination. As is explained in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the unenlightened being continually searches for variety, only ever briefly discovering enjoyment “[s]eeking delight here and there” (*tatra tatrābhinandinī*).<sup>461</sup> In other words, the pleasant feelings (*vedanā*) that are

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<sup>458</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1014.

<sup>459</sup> ‘Saṅgāyatanasamyutta’ (SN 35:230), in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1228.

<sup>460</sup> This idea is expressed in the *Uraga Sutta*: “Leaving the old through craving for the new — Pursuit of longings never from bondage frees; It is but letting go to grasp afresh as monkeys reach from branch to branch of trees” (*Uraga Sutta* v.791) for more on this see: Thanissaro Bhikkhu. <http://www.accesstinsight.org/Tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.4.04.than.html>.

<sup>461</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1051.

experienced when one becomes engrossed in something it is only ever momentary and will ultimately lead to feelings of dissatisfaction and craving.

Buddhism recognises *kāma-taṇhā* as that which traps a person within the cycle of *samsāra*, ensuring the continual experience of *dukkha*, thereby preventing their enlightenment.<sup>462</sup>

This has clear allusions to Kierkegaard's aesthete, for both conceptions insist that that the person who prizes sense pleasures (*kāma-bhogin*) above all else, will fail to find lasting satisfaction.<sup>463</sup> Both systems of thought recognise that the material world and its associated pleasures are temporary, and, likewise, the satisfaction that can be drawn from an object or encounter is also transitory. Fittingly, both systems of thought infer that the material world is unable to quench the individual's cravings for pleasure, which will lead to that person having continually to strive for new phenomena in a flawed attempt to find lasting happiness. Both systems of thought advocate that true satisfaction can only be attained when one is recognising the limitations of the nature of the world, and when one turns inwards to discover the true nature of their being. Failure to turn inwards will ensure means failure to find lasting satisfaction, and continual suffering, plagued by cravings and unfulfilled desires.

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<sup>462</sup> This idea is explored in the *Abhidhamma* literature; it is found, for example, illustrated in a metaphor, where the concept of sensory attachment (*Lobha*) is compared to a glue that binds a person to the material world (*Abhidhamma*). This metaphor continues to liken the person to a monkey that is caught by a hunter, who had applied a sticky gum to the bark of a tree. Here the metaphor suggests that the temporal world lures the individual by enticing them through their senses. The material world that gives rise to desire is illustrated by the sticky gum, so that when the gum is struck by the sun's rays and reflects a spectrum of colours, it is akin to the material world eliciting great desires in the individual. The metaphorical gum, standing in for the temporal world, entices a person, causing them to focus on immediate gratification, and causing them to act without reflection on the possible consequences of their actions. The outcome of this situation is the entrapment of the person by their cravings—like the monkey who has touched the gum, the person is fixed to their desires, and trapped by the limitations of the temporal world.

<sup>463</sup> Y. Karunadasa, 'The Buddhist Critique of Sassatavada and Uccchedavada: The Key to a proper Understanding of the Origin and the Doctrines of early Buddhism', (2004), <http://www.budsas.org/ebud/ebdha263.htm>, 22 June 2017.

Whilst De Silva adequately explores the relationship between the aesthete and *kāma-taṇhā*, he fails to examine the link between the despair of the aesthete and *vibhava-taṇhā*. He thereby fails to examine how both Kierkegaard and Buddhism maintain that a life of sensual pleasures precedes, and necessarily leads to, feelings of despair and melancholy. For while De Silva correctly indicates that *kāma-taṇhā* gives rise to *dukkha*, by arousing cravings and dissatisfaction, he fails to consider how these feelings inevitably intensify, leading a person to crave the complete annihilation of their existence. This craving for annihilation is recognised as *vibhava-taṇhā*—a complex term, defined by scholar of Theravāda Buddhism, Mahāthera Ledi Sayadaw (2016) as “having delight in the wrong view of self-annihilation (*uccheda-ditthi*)”.<sup>464</sup> Whilst not an exact translation, Sayadaw’s classification captures the essence of this complex and wide-reaching term. For, as is implied by Tibetan leader the Dalai Lama (2016), the term is rooted in the idea of escape, and the suggestion that it is possible to overcome one’s current situation by ceasing to exist.<sup>465</sup> This is not to say that all individuals, who are driven by *vibhava-taṇhā*, should be regarded as being in a state of despair. On the contrary, in an alternative publication of De Silva’s concerning Buddhist psychology, he explains that, often, the drive of *vibhava-taṇhā* can arise in a person when they believe they have obtained everything they had hoped for in their current life. In such a scenario, the person will seek death as a gateway to further achievement in the next life. Bhikkhu Anālayo (2012) notes that there are seven grounds (*vatthu*) that lead to the craving of self-annihilation, and these seven grounds each represent a different understanding of the nature of the self, and the means to destroy it. These grounds include identifying

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<sup>464</sup> Mahāthera Ledi Sayadaw, *The Manuals of Dhamma* (Onalaska: Vipassana Research Publications, 2016), p.191.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid.

oneself with divine material, trying to return to the divine body, and trying to move into a realm beyond material attainments. However, of the seven different *vatthu*, it is the first that reflects most clearly Kierkegaard's understanding of the aesthetic life, and the dread it inspires, as the first *vatthu* refers to a materialistic comprehension of self. The first *vatthu* pertains to the attitude of the person who perceives themselves and the world as purely physical in nature, as lacking a spiritual dimension. The aesthete of Kierkegaard is similarly presented as one who recognises both themselves and the world as primarily physical in nature, for unlike the other two spheres of life (the ethical and the religious), there is no room for spirituality within the aesthete's approach to life.<sup>466</sup> Theologian Peder Jothen (2014), maintains that there are strong links between the prevailing attitudes of the aesthete and that of an atheist, due to the fact that neither place any value on the role God in the life of an individual; the aesthete, for instance, continually breaks God's holy law in order to obtain temporary gratification.<sup>467</sup> It is reasonable to regard the aesthete as possessing an exclusively materialistic approach to nature, as one devoid of spiritual concerns, and akin, therefore, to those individuals contained within the first *vatthu*.

Therefore, in similar terms to the first *vatthu*, the aesthete's desire for annihilation is rooted in their craving for liberation from the problems associated with their temporal existence.<sup>468</sup>

This notion is supported by Judge William, in his proclamation that the aesthete only suffers

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<sup>466</sup> This can be seen through the aesthete's preoccupation with the material world, as they hold sensory pleasure to be the ultimate goal in life, thus rejecting the need to form a relationship with God, disregarding all that can be considered sacred. For those aesthetes who do attempt to practice a religion, such as Christianity, see it as they see all pursuits as fleeting interest which does not require commitment. Therefore, their interest is not in forming a relationship with the divine but rather extracting pleasure from religious practices before finding a new interest.

<sup>467</sup> Peder Jothen, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood: The Art of Subjectivity* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), p.246.

<sup>468</sup> Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, p.14.



“despair over the earthly or over something earthly”.<sup>469</sup> Here we also see that the aesthete is concerned only with the physical aspects of their existence, meaning the despair which drives their compulsion to will their own death is firmly established on temporal or materialistic grounds—a scenario akin to the first *vatthu* of *vibhava-taṇhā*. The aesthete regards themselves as weak and completely devoid of inherent meaning; they are unable to escape the mental anguish of their despair—a condition that Kierkegaard claims is due to their incapacity to recognise themselves as free beings. The aesthete is therefore trapped in a state of despair due to their inability to recognise themselves as having spiritual and infinite qualities, for if they were able to harness their freedom, they would be able to affirm their own existence through choice,<sup>470</sup> and in the process, gain a sense of control over their existence through their self-awareness.<sup>471</sup> But, alas, their continuing denial of their spiritual nature deludes them into believing that the only liberation possible is achieved through their lack of existence. The aesthete can therefore be regarded as conforming to the Dalai Lama’s interpretation of *vibhava-taṇhā*, wherein two distinct reasons for a person’s desire for self-annihilation is presented. Firstly, he claims that a person will crave non-existence as a means of escaping that which they do not like within the world. This clearly reflects the motivation of the aesthete, who wills death as a means to escape the despair they feel at never achieving lasting satisfaction in their temporal pursuits.<sup>472473</sup> This notion, in turn, leads to the Dalai Lama’s second reason for *vibhava-taṇhā*: that one may

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<sup>469</sup>Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.80.

<sup>470</sup>Ibid, p.543.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid, p.542.

<sup>472</sup> Dalai Lama & Thubten Chodron, *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2014), p.51.

<sup>473</sup> As is alluded to in *Enten – Eller*, when it is instigated that the aesthete requires a second world beyond their current state of existence “a world of gauze, lighter, more ethereal” Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part I*, p. 306. This is a realm which will free them from the possibility of despair. This passage is understood by Kierkegaardian scholar, Martin Klebes (2015) as subtly implying that the aesthete is overwhelmed by suicidal urges, desperate to find solace from the pains of his temporal existence. For more on this see Klebes (2015).

regard non-existence as a final salvation, and bringer of peace.<sup>474</sup> This, too, reflects the aesthete's longing for self-annihilation, as belief in this notion will liberate them from the suffering they are forced to endure; removing them from what Watkin (1990) dubs "a state of suicidal depression punctuated by occasional bursts of pleasure".<sup>475</sup> Death is seen by the aesthete as a means of ending their psychological torment. They are unable to recognise that peace is achieved through self-realization, and consequently, they crave self-annihilation.

Throughout the pervious paragraphs (see pages 194-197) it has become increasing clear, that De Silva's comparison between Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere of existence and the Buddhist notion of *taṇhā* is limited. I readily admit that I have drawn similar conclusions to De Silva by identifying clear points of parallel between the aesthetic mode of life and *kāma-taṇhā*. We both claim, for instance, that the aesthetic way of life and *kāma-taṇhā* clearly illustrate our human tendency to desire sensual pleasures—and to the extent that such desires cloud the mind, and lead to deluded, false perceptions of reality: a perception of the world that suggest its objects can bring lasting satisfaction. However, alongside these points of similarity, there are further parallels that De Silva fails to note. For instance, the parallels between the aesthete's response to the despair they endure, and the Buddhist conception of *vibhava-taṇhā*. This parallel is rooted in the fact that the aesthete is only able to recognise themselves as a material being, and is subsequently unable to harness their spiritual or infinite aspects; in this way, he or she is unable to will themselves out of despair by making meaningful choices. Instead, he or she believes they require temporal objects to grant them temporary purpose or meaning. Conversely, when they are unable to extract a

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<sup>474</sup> Dalai Lama & Chodron, *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions*, p.51.

<sup>475</sup> Julia Watkin, 'Kierkegaard's view of death', in *History of European Ideas* vol.12, no.1 (1990), p.66.

temporary purpose from temporal pleasures, they become overcome by the despair they are so desperate to repress. Unable to will themselves out of this scenario, the aesthete longs for death, hoping that this will free them from the suffering they endure.

Kierkegaard's interpretation of the aesthetic life, then, clearly reflects the first *vatthu* of *vibhava-taṇhā*, in so far as both recognise that a materialistic approach to life leads a person to will death as a means to escape the difficulties they face.

I have clearly demonstrated that Kierkegaard's aesthetic lifestyle has correlations with both *kāma-taṇhā* and *vibhava-taṇhā*, thereby signalling that the relationship between Kierkegaard and Buddhism is, once again, not limited to the concept of *angest*, but, on the contrary, having a far greater scope and meaningful relationship with Kierkegaard's approach to suffering and materialism.

### The Ethical

The ethical sphere of life, as I noted, contrasts strongly with the aesthetic mode, with its focus on self-reflection and social responsibility. The ethicist is able to overcome his or her feelings of despair, for they possess self-awareness, which for Kierkegaard, is founded on their ability to recognise the spiritual dimension within them, and therefore, able to utilise their freedom to create meaning for themselves. The ethicist is able to overcome the despair that haunts the aesthete by making a conscious effort to direct their own life through their own choices.<sup>476</sup> As one would expect, the striking contrasts between the ethical and aesthetic spheres assures that the ethical approach to life has its own unique

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<sup>476</sup> Valentine Ehichioya Obinyan. 'Nature of Human Existence in Kierkegaard's Ethical Philosophy: A Step towards Self-Valuation and Transformation in Our Contemporary World' *International Journal of Philosophy* vol.2, no.1 (2014), p.1.

relationship with Buddhism—one completely distinct from that of the aesthetic. For, the ethicist approaches life rationally; he or she reflects on his or her decisions, and as such, the ethicist does not form attachments to the world through impulse, but controls his or her desires, preventing them from consuming him or her. This has led me to conclude that the ethicist does not fall prey to *kāma-taṇhā* in the way that the aesthete does, for while he or she may desire material pleasures, he or she does not allow this desire to overwhelm them.<sup>477</sup>

However, when reading the second volume of *Enten–Eller*, it becomes increasingly clear that Kierkegaard intends his readers to recognise that the ethicist falls prey to a different form of desire. The problematic desire for the ethicist is in the idea that they themselves exist as an individual with an enduring identity. This is evident early on in the second volume of *Enten – Eller* when, in contrast to A, who remains anonymous throughout volume one,<sup>478</sup> the Judge is eager to present to his readers a full disclosure of his identity, by providing several biographical details, such as his name, occupation, material status, and so on. I wish to suggest that, unlike the aesthete who is unable to establish a lasting identity, the Judge has a firm sense of who he is, and—as I shall show—the Judge makes decisions that are designed to further his sense of self, and the identity that he proceeds to project on the world.<sup>479</sup> In this way, I shall demonstrate that, whilst Kierkegaard presents the ethicist as being in control of their sensory impulses, he clearly suggests that the ethicist is attached to their sense of self and to the continuation of their own individual existence. The intensity of

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<sup>477</sup> Thomas Gilbert, 'Problems of Kierkegaard's Poetics', in *Episteme*: Vol.22 (2011), p.40.

<sup>478</sup> Kierkegaard's choice to have A remain anonymous could be seen as reflective of the fact that A does not possess a permanent identity, with A failing to form a lasting sense of who he or she is, continually transforming themselves to conform to the demands of their latest obsession.

<sup>479</sup> Helene Tallon Russell, *Irigaray and Kierkegaard: On the Construction of the Self* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009), p.60.

the ethicist's craving for their social identity is evident from the Judge's claim that it is his own "misfortune is this: an angel of death always walks at my side",<sup>480</sup> in so far as it shows that he is constantly aware of his own mortality, fearing that he will one day cease to exist. I wish to contend, therefore, that the ethicist reveals meaningful comparisons to the Buddhist concept of *bhava-taṇhā*, as both positions are ingrained in the individual's craving for a continued existence.

In order to analyse the similarities between the ethicist and *bhava-taṇhā* effectively, it is first necessary to examine the ethical sphere in more depth. This will help me to validate my assertion that the ethicist is not concerned with sensory pleasures in the same way as the aesthete, but instead, values their sense of individualism and continued existence. This is vital as the existing literature on this topic, written by De Silva, has failed to recognise that the Judge is motivated by his inner existence as opposed to the external world. This has led De Silva to focus his work on the assumption that the Judge, like the aesthete, is ensnared by *kāma-taṇhā*. For instance, De Silva claims that the Judge's continuous endorsement of marriage should be interpreted as the ethicist's craving for sensory pleasure in light of their relationships with others and social systems more generally.<sup>481</sup> But, this is to misconstrue the ethicist's relationship with marriage and social institutions more generally, for as I shall discuss later in this chapter (see pages 210-211), the ethicist's preoccupation with social systems is not rooted in the sensory pleasures that may be involved in them, but in the sense of permanence that these systems provide. As will become clear, these social systems are often associated with religious doctrines, which means that by choosing to conform to

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<sup>480</sup>Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.41.

<sup>481</sup>De Silva, 'The Critique of Pleasure in Søren Kierkegaard and Early Buddhism', p.19.

them, the ethicist feels he or she has earned a place in the afterlife, thereby establishing an eternal existence for themselves.<sup>482</sup>

The philosopher, Roger S. Gottlieb (1979) asserts that the defining characteristic of Kierkegaard's ethical mode of existence is an awareness of themselves as a distinct individual, with "individual choice [being] central to personal identity".<sup>483</sup> The notions of self-awareness and choice are dependent on the presence of Spirit. Thus, the ethical sphere involves a person being aware of their infinite capabilities. Indeed, the ethicist, as personified by Kierkegaard's Judge William, should be understood as a personification of the Kierkegaardian conception of the individual Self.<sup>484</sup> For, as is explored throughout the second volume of *Enten – Eller*, the ethical individual (*sittlichkeit*) is one capable of self-evaluation, self-reflection, and of making socially appropriate decisions that frame them as honourable and responsible citizens. Judge William thereby asserts:

The Self that is the objective is not only a personal self but a social, a civic self. He then possesses himself as a task in an activity whereby he engages in the affairs of life as this specific personality. Here his task is not to form himself but to act, and yet he forms himself at the same time, because, as I noted above, the ethical individual lives in such a way that he is continually transferring himself from one stage to another.<sup>485</sup>

The Judge values social activity and the ability to embrace societal expectations. It should be noted, however, that in conforming to the expectations of their society, the ethicist does

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<sup>482</sup>Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.267.

<sup>483</sup> Roger S. Gottlieb, 'Kierkegaard's Ethical Individualism', *The Monist* vol.62, no.3 (1979), p.351.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup>Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, pp.262-263.

not feel constrained; they do not feel they are forced to adhere to values or customs that they do not agree with. Rather, the ethicist views society's expectations as an objective expression of the values that they themselves personally hold. Social conventions are thereby expressions of their own personal convictions. Kierkegaardian scholar, Julie Watkin (1997) develops this point by maintaining that the ethical mode of existence unites the values of society and the individual, and in the process, unites the ethicist's desire for structure with their awareness of personal freedom.<sup>486</sup> Watkin concludes that, even though the ethicist chooses a life of conformity, they do so freely. In other words, the ethicist is aware that they can rebel against sociological and religious conventions if they so wish, but they choose not to; they make the decision to live a life of conformity, believing that their compliance furthers their personal aspirations. The Judge asserts, "the more freedom [one possesses], the more [the] self-surrender",<sup>487</sup> and thereby indicates that he even though he lives a measured, conventional, and conservative life, he remains conscious of his freedom. Judge William is aware of his freedom,<sup>488</sup> and the control it gives him over his own life, enabling him to establish his own identity. The identity of the ethicist is, therefore, one he or she has crafted for themselves; it is not crafted by impulses or an innate sense of identity, but in measured response to who they believe they ought to be. Kierkegaardian scholar, Benjamin Bogeskov (2014) argues that the ethicist does not allow themselves to choose what has meaning for them according to their natural aptitudes or curiosities, but according to the pursuits that will ensure the continuation of their identity, such as "pursuing a career

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<sup>486</sup> Julia Watkin, *Kierkegaard* (London: Continuum, 2000), p.66.

<sup>487</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.362.

<sup>488</sup> He notes, for example: "in possession of his self as posited by himself, that is chosen by himself as free" Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.227.

and raising a family”.<sup>489</sup> This idea is explored throughout the second volume of *Enten – Eller*. It is most striking revealed, perhaps, in passages where the Judge emphasises the importance of fatherhood, for instance when he states: “Bring up your children well and you will come to know what you owe your parents”.<sup>490</sup> This extract is particularly revealing of the motivations of the ethicist, for it discusses parenthood in terms of debt, highlighting not only that parents have a duty to care for their children, but also that through receiving care, the children become indebted to their parents, thereby ensuring that the parents are cared for in their old age. In approaching life in this manner, the ethicist attempts to guarantee that basic social needs are met, providing for themselves and ensuring the continuation of their family line. Indeed, it is only through assuring their place within society and within a family that the ethicist be able—in the words of Nataliya Vorobyova (2009)—to “continue to exist”.<sup>491</sup>

I wish to claim that the ethicist’s approach corresponds to the presentation of *bhava-taṇhā* as found within the Pāli literature. As I have mentioned, *bhava-taṇhā* is the second of the three forms of *taṇhā*, and, as such, is associated with an individual’s craving for continued existence. It is dubbed by the scholar of Asian religions, Kashi Nath Upadhyaya (1971), as a craving for personal immortality or self-preservation.<sup>492</sup> This bares striking resemblance to the desires of Kierkegaard’s ethicist, who, too, longs for his or her identity to remain for all time. Indeed, Phillip Moffitt (2012) contends that—much like Kierkegaard’s ethicist, *bhava-taṇhā* is expressed through a desire to “ensure [one’s] continuation through genetic

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<sup>489</sup> Benjamin Miguel Olivares Bøgeskov, ‘Happiness’, in *Kierkegaard’s Concepts Tome III: Envy to Incognito*, Steven N. Emmanuel, William McDonald & Jon Stewart (eds) (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p.141.

<sup>490</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.76.

<sup>491</sup> Nataliya Vorobyova, ‘The History of Rome in Kierkegaard’s Works’, in *Kierkegaard and the Roman World*, Jon Stewart (ed) (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p.62.

<sup>492</sup> Kashi Nath Upadhyaya, *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavadgita* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1998), p.177.



extension”.<sup>493</sup> It is clear that both the Pāli texts and Kierkegaard’s *Enten – Eller* propose a basic human drive to ensure one’s own existence, and, furthermore, that this drive influences the decisions and choices one makes, by encouraging people to adhere to a specific lifestyle in an attempt to satisfy this instinct, and thereby ensure the continuation of their existence in one form or another.

By presenting the Judge as one who seeks continually to overcome his aesthetic desires in order to establish himself as a man who conforms to society’s expectations of him, Kierkegaard presents the ethical approach to life as one that recognises human life as subjective and grounded within the freedom of choice. The Judge claims, therefore, that each person must prize one duty above all else, the duty to “choose for oneself”.<sup>494</sup>

However, what exactly the Judge means by choosing for oneself<sup>495</sup> is easy to misconstrue. This is because commentators of Kierkegaard occasionally assume he intended the Judge to personify a particular ethical position, or particular moral stance to life. De Silva appears to have misconstrued Kierkegaard’s ethicist in this way, for he appears confused by Kierkegaard’s employment of the term ‘ethical’ in this context, and he subsequently attempts to extract from the pronouncements of Judge William a particular approach to moral philosophy, and he seeks to compare this moral approach with ethical approaches in Buddhism, such as the *pañcasīlāni* (five precepts).<sup>496</sup> But this, I claim, is to miss the point of

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<sup>493</sup>Phillip Moffitt, *Dancing With Life: Buddhist Insights for Finding Meaning and Joy in the Face of Suffering* (New York: Rodale Inc, 2012), p.147. Moffitt’s comment can be seen as possessing a double meaning. On the one hand, it suggests that children can help ensure their parents are cared for when they become elderly; and on the other, it suggests a sense of personal continuation through the continuation of one’s genetic code, passed on to future generations. Whilst the latter example’s interpretation is of little relevance to the comparison between the Pāli texts and Kierkegaard, the former is clearly related to the Judge’s assessment of family life. See also: Webster (2005), who refers to *bhava-taṇhā* as the most basic or fundamental form of craving, owing to the human instinct for self-preservation. He continues to note that the concept has implications, both for the individual’s current life, and in the eternalist world view.

<sup>494</sup>Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.170.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup>De Silva, ‘The Critique of Pleasure in Søren Kierkegaard and Early Buddhism’, pp.19-20.

Judge William. The writings of Judge William do *not* attempt to promote a specific moral philosophy. Indeed, De Silva suddenly changes his line of argument—as if forced to recognise his error, but without due acknowledgement. For De Silva uses the term ‘ethical’ later in his discussion to denote a more general moral outlook on life. Thus, the ethicist’s choice in *Enten – Eller* is not ethical choice, for Kierkegaard does not attempt to advocate a code of morality in this work. Rather, the choice which confronts each ethicist is a metaphysical one, which requires them to establish the direction of their own lives. Subsequently, when Kierkegaard implies that the ethicist is capable of approaching their life subjectively, he is not maintaining that the ethicist possesses a subjective approach to ethics, but, rather, that the ethicist is able to recognise that they are capable of making decisive choices, and, moreover, has control over their identity.

Those within the ethical sphere of life are aware of their choices, and aware of their capability for change and growth. Unlike the aesthete, the ethicist does not rely on luck or fortune, but can take active steps to maintain their goals. For example, when the Judge ascertains that a man must take a wife in order to conform to the ideals of society,<sup>497</sup> he demonstrates that his awareness of the lack such a man has, in his pre-material state; that it leads this man to become “alone with one’s sorrow, alone with one’s despair—which [makes] one is cowardly”.<sup>498</sup> Thus, in this example the Judge suggests that an ethicist is able to recognise the limitations of a man’s single status, for it makes them lonely and isolated; equally, he suggests that the ethicist is one who can envision an alternative future, where these limitations have been overcome, through the union of marriage. The ethicist

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<sup>497</sup> By stating that one must “think of family life in its beauty, founded on a deep and intimate community in such a way that what joins it all together is still mysteriously hidden” Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.85.

<sup>498</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.84.

recognises that they have the means, through their choices, to change their current predicaments.

I wish to underscore the point that the central focus of the ethicist is their status as an individual. Thus, even though Judge William places great emphasis on the significance of marriage and other social intuitions, these social conventions are employed by the ethicist to further his or her quest for permanence. Although the ethicist values these temporal social systems, their interest in them stems from their capacity either to sustain their earthly life, or to help them to secure a place in the afterlife. Thus, the Judge asserts, through marriage one can attain a “heaven even higher”.<sup>499</sup> Indeed, Leone (2014), in his description of the ethical life, maintains that the ethicist desires “the temporal and passing to be permanent and eternal”.<sup>500</sup> Through this description, Leone highlights the fact that the ethicist is unable to accept the impermanent nature of the material world, because this evokes his or her own impermanent nature, and in response to this, the ethicist attempts to establish social systems and institutions that create the illusion of permanence. It is clear therefore, that Judge Williams’ preoccupation with the institution of marriage exposes his desire for a *permanent* societal structure that can liberate people from the aesthetic mode of existence,<sup>501</sup> here the Judge asserts that marriage sanctifies eroticism and makes procreation a religious duty. This sanctification enables the purification of the sexual urge by justifying it as a means to religious obedience—thereby fulfilling the Biblical commandments of Genesis (9:7) that tell one to “Go forth and multiply”. In this way, the Judge attempts to transform the sexual acts from pleasurable acts—that entertained the aesthete—to a

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<sup>499</sup> Ibid, p. 342.

<sup>500</sup> Leone, *Kierkegaard’s Existentialism: The Theological Self and the Existential Self*, p.16.

<sup>501</sup> Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard*, p.76.

universal and eternal duty. He thereby gives moral and spiritual justification for these temporal desires, by contending that, within the social institution of marriage, lust is transformed from *eros* to *agape*. Moreover, by approaching sex as a sacred act, the ethicist is able to claim that sexual activity brings one closer to God, as sexual union in marriage proves a person's obedience to God, and, by the same token, ensures the promise of eternal life. The notion that one can approach God through temporal pursuits is significant to the ethicist. The Judge maintains that:

A religiously developed person makes a practice of referring everything to God, of permeating and saturating every finite relation with the thought of God, and thereby consecrating and ennobling it.<sup>502</sup>

It is therefore clear that, from the perspective of the ethicist, the temporal world is a means to relating to God; for the ethicist recognises that all temporal phenomena lack inherent value, and that it is God who should be prioritised. However, despite this recognition of the limitations of the temporal world, the ethicist—according to Kierkegaard—fails to realise that true liberation from the temporal world, requires one to sacrifice all attachments to it. The ethicist is therefore in a problematic situation. For they are deluded in their belief that their relationship with God is achieved when they conform to social norms.<sup>503</sup> The ethical position is akin, I suggest, to the false Christian that I discussed throughout Chapter Two (see pages 66-81), as both believe that a person is able to relate to God, whilst at the same time as being attached to the temporal world—a position that Kierkegaard himself fervently rejects. Thus, Kierkegaard would contend that the ethicist's approach to God conflicts with

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<sup>502</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.43.

<sup>503</sup> Lee C. Barrett, 'Immortality', in *Kierkegaard's Concepts Tome III: Envy to Incognito*, Steven N. Emmanuel, William McDonald & Jon Stewart (eds) (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p.140.

the true path to God, for, as I will explain in detail in Chapter Five (see pages 285-291), Christ taught that the path to eternity is one of isolation and sacrifice. Those who approach life from an ethical mode of existence are therefore in direct conflict with the tenants of true Christianity, as they maintain that one can become worthy of God's grace by participating in his creation, while Kierkegaard advocates that one can never become worthy of God's grace, rather, one receives it through complete detachment to his creation.

So far it has been made evident that the Judge does not reject the idea of temporal phenomena—such as 'love' completely; on the contrary, he asserts that it is through associated social institutions—such as marriage—that phenomena can be transformed from their temporal status to an eternal one. This is to say, marriage strengthens romantic love, transforming it from *eros* to *agape*, and, moreover, providing access to eternity for both husband and wife. According to Judge William, marriage transforms love to a "higher concentricity".<sup>504</sup> Marriage is regarded by the Judge as something beyond the limits of temporal existence—a sacred union that persists infinitely, connecting the couple, not only to each other, but to God. This is made apparent by the Judge when he attests:

[I]t is clear that [love] points beyond itself to something higher, but the point is whether this something higher cannot promptly enter into combination with the first love. This something higher is the religious, in which the reflection of the understanding ends.... In the religious, love again finds the infinity that it sought in vain in reflective love.<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> As it binds the couple together forever, as "lovers swear faithfulness to each other by the moon, the stars, by their dead father's ashes" Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.57.

<sup>505</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.30.

In marriage, romantic love is presented in its absolute form, as it is no longer a product of lust or infatuation (as it is when experienced within the aesthetic mode), but is transformed to a union of two people, ensuring that both partners are faithful and supportive of one another. In this way, contrary to the aesthete's understanding of romantic love, marriage provides security and enables the revelation of one to another, while also remaining faithful to the will of God.

Kierkegaardian scholar, James Daniel Collins (1983) contends that the marriage union is itself a "sign that the ethical can dominate chance and fate".<sup>506</sup> He thus highlights that, through marriage, the ethicist attempts to establish a structure of conformity to society, for it establishes preconceived roles for each person, including traditional gender roles (whereby, for instance, the husband is confirmed as the one who has a divinely ordained duty to provide for his family, while the wife is the one required to raise and nurture their children). The linguist, Céline León (2008), criticises Kierkegaard's marginalisation of women in *Enten – Eller* in this regard, due to Judge William's regard for women in terms of 'wife' or 'mother', while men, by contrast, are granted the freedom to define themselves and to create an identity outside of the traditional family unit.<sup>507</sup> These kinds of pronouncements are found frequently throughout the Judge's appraisals of himself throughout the text, for he readily discusses his own role within society, and in so doing, he highlights how he has risen in society to the position of Judge, while his wife is mentioned only in terms of her relationship with him. Similarly, when discussing the advantages of marriage, Judge William asserts that the sacrament bestows on his authority: "this authority", he claims, "will

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<sup>506</sup> Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard*, p.76.

<sup>507</sup> Céline León, *The Neither/nor of the Second Sex: Kierkegaard on Women, Sexual Difference, and Sexual Relations* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008), p.9.

command [my wife] to be faithful”.<sup>508</sup> Whilst, he does concede that “her hint is my command”,<sup>509</sup> he suggests that he himself grants her some authority so as to prevent her from feeling inferior. Despite the Judge’s attempt to pacify his wife, by claiming that she, too, has authority in the marriage, the Judge, and moreover ethicists in general, conform to this traditionalist view of marriage.<sup>510</sup> By recognising marriage as a societal blueprint, the Judge, once again, attempts to integrate himself within a permanent structure that ensures his personal and social success in the continuation of a functioning society. The ethical sphere thereby reflects a human longing to belong to something bigger than the individual self, and subsequently presents the position of the ethicists as one in which they delude themselves into believing that basic human drives and social institutions possess a permanent meaning and purpose.

The ethicist’s quest is to secure a lasting identity, and it is for this reason that Judge Williams finds it so easy to criticise the aesthete for their fleeting approach to life, and for their lack of desire to establish a more coherent and unified approach to life. The ethical life is rooted in the need to establish an enduring identity, in contrast to the aesthete whose identity transforms with each new fleeting interest. The ethicist is therefore one who recognises their capacity to govern their life, and who, nevertheless, consistently chooses the same options throughout their lives in order to create the illusion of permanence, by maintaining the same values throughout their life in a desperate hope that they will imbue their life with meaning.<sup>511</sup> Moreover, Kierkegaardian scholar, Julia Watkin (2002) insist that, by adhering

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<sup>508</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.52.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid, p.53.

<sup>510</sup> In so doing, ethicists maintain that conformity to social norms creates an efficient means to govern society, as it ensures economic prosperity, whereby men are encouraged to contribute to the economy through employment enterprises, while women ensure the continuation of society through the bearing and raising of children.

<sup>511</sup> C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.91.

to strict socio-religious customs, the ethicist is not simply trying to create the illusion of enduring social institutions or a permanent identity, but, rather, is striving to achieve everlasting life in heaven.<sup>512</sup> This is apparent in the Judge's rejection of his self-centred urges, for he believes that by behaving in accordance with basic Christian teachings (through living as part of a Christian society), he can prove his devotion to God, and prove he is worthy of a place in eternity. Watkin maintains that, for Judge William, the temporal world is a place wherein every person is positioned by God in order that they can then demonstrate their devotion to him by conforming to his holy law.<sup>513</sup> According to the ethicist, it is the duty of each person to overcome the finite sphere of his or her existence by living a life of obedience to religious dogma and placing the values of the Church over and above their own human impulses. By doing this, the ethicist aspires to acquire an eternal status, with a place in heaven. It is important to note that, although the notion of self-denial as a means of expressing one's devotion to Christ appears to reflect Kierkegaard's ideas in *Evangeliet om Lidelser*, it is, in fact, very different. The ethicist's response to God is rooted in delusion: in a misrepresentation of temporal structures. The ethicist values Church dogma, and social institutions (such as marriage) are regarded by him or her as divinely inspired. The ethicist believes that by conforming to social institutions he or she is conforming to God's holy law. This means when the ethicist attempts to prove themselves before God through self-denial, they can only partially realise their goal, for while they may deny their human impulses, they still value temporal phenomena, and thereby hold religious, social, and economic systems in high esteem. This places the ethicist's understanding of self-denial

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<sup>512</sup> Julia Watkin, 'The Logic of Søren Kierkegaard's Misogyny, 1845-1855', in *Søren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers: Volume 4*, Daniel W. Conway & K. E. Gover (eds) (London: Routledge, 2002), p.347.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.



at odds with Kierkegaard's own, for as I have previously explained, Kierkegaard maintains that the Church and society, as a whole, must also be rejected to enable one to focus on one's *direct* relationship with God, not one that is *mediated* by temporal institutions. In this way, Kierkegaard argues that in the ethicist's attempts to conform to religious and social traditions, he or she is preventing this meaningful relationship with God from developing.

I have clearly established that the ethicist's central focus is the value of individuality, and the quest for personal immortality. This quest ultimately governs their approach to life. The identity they seek to establish for themselves—including their choice of occupation and material status—is chosen to appease God, with a view to being rewarded with eternal life. Although Kierkegaard insists that the ethicist is aware of his or her capacity to choose, their potential freedom is somewhat constricted, for while they have the capacity to choose an alternative approach to life, they remain strictly adherent to the traditional lifestyle that is advocated through Christian dogma.<sup>514</sup> As such, the ethicist, while having the capacity to employ their freedom, inevitably limits themselves with their craving for personal immortality. Thus, unlike Kierkegaard's characterisation of the Biblical Abraham in his 1843 publication *Frygt og Bæven* [*Fear and Trembling*], the ethicist cannot overcome their obedience to the Church, and act with complete autonomy. When confronted with God's request to kill his son Isaac, Abraham chooses to act in blind faith, and thereby accept that he is hearing the true voice of God, and not the conventional doctrines that he had, before then, been adhering to. It is this *choice* that distinguishes Abraham from the ethicist, and which sees Abraham as overcoming ethical thought. By trusting in his own convictions, and *choosing* to conform to God's request, Abraham harnesses his free will to make his own

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<sup>514</sup> David Roberts, 'The Integrity of Evil: Kierkegaard on the Actualization of Human Evil', in *Philosophy Today*, vol.54, no.4 (2010), p.367.

decision, and one that is in complete contrast to the expectations of his religion. According to the Kierkegaardian scholar, John Davenport (2015), Abraham acts in the most “noble expression of free will”,<sup>515</sup> and acting through faith as opposed to desire. In this way, it would seem that, in spite of the Judge’s criticism of the aesthetic, the Judge’s actions are also rooted in desire—his desires are merely directed differently, with a view to establishing his individual existence in accordance with societal expectations.

The ethicist’s preoccupation with their own sense of identity also reveals a connection to the concept of five aggregates as found within the Pāli texts. This is because of the Pāli teaching that *bhava-taṇhā* arises as a product of the five aggregates, wherein one’s sense of self leads one to crave personal immortality (*sassata-dṭṭhi*). This notion is found in the *Catukkanipāta* (AN 4:49), where the Buddha teaches “perceiving a self in what is non-self”,<sup>516</sup> is evidence of a distorted mind, which prevents one from realising one’s true nature. As I discussed in Chapter Three (see pages 132-134), this distortion leads one to cling to the false conception of ‘I’, encouraging a desire to establish a permanent identity, which is then projected on to the world. The establishment of such an identity does not just give rise to the desire to preserve one’s current life, as previously discussed, but also, leads one to crave a continued existence after death. The establishment of a sense of self is not limited to one’s current existence but can arise in the mind a sense of permanence, where one holds that their continuation must be rooted in the existence of a permanent ontological self which survives when the physical body dies. Rahula links this notion to the four nutriments (*āhāra*), which are understood as the four conditions which are necessary for

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<sup>515</sup> John Davenport, ‘Eschatological Faith and Repetition: Kierkegaard’s Abraham and Job’, in *Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling*, Daniel Conway (ed) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.99.

<sup>516</sup> *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, p.438.

the continued existence of a sentient being. These are food or nutrition (*kabalinkārāhāra*), sensory contact with the external world (*phassāhāra*), consciousness (*viññāṇāhāra*) and mental volition (*manosancetanāhāra*).<sup>517</sup> It is the final nutriment, that is of specific significance here, owing to *manosancetanāhāra* being associated with one's will to live, not only in one's current life but also in future rebirths as part of the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Like this *bhava-taṇhā* is seen as ingrained in a belief in eternalism and permanence, a belief that one's identity persists both throughout their current life and also after death. This craving for continuation is conferred by Peter Harvey who expresses that *bhava-taṇhā* can be seen as ego-related, with the individual yearning for both a specific identity within their current life and thirst for a particular type of rebirth.<sup>518</sup> Thus, as is made clear within the *Catukkanipāta* (AN 4.1.99), *bhava-taṇhā* is comprehended as being nourished by *avijjā*, as it stems from one's inability to recognise their conditioned and impermanent nature,<sup>519</sup> thereby binding the individual to the cycle of *saṃsāra*.

Despite the clear differences between their respective beliefs about the possibility of eternal existence, there are clear affinities between Kierkegaard's ethical mode of existence and *bhava-taṇhā*. This is because both systems of thought recognise that a person can become consumed by the notion of identity, valuing personal existence above all else. Thus, while Kierkegaard's belief in the existence of an eternal soul sets apart his approach from Buddhism, both positions view attachment to one's own existence as an obstacle to overcoming suffering. For Kierkegaard, if a person is attached to their sense of Self, they focus their attentions on the temporal world, and value their own existence over

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<sup>517</sup>Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, p.30.

<sup>518</sup>Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*, pp.53-60.

<sup>519</sup>David Webster, *The Philosophy of Desire in the Buddhist Pāli Canon* (Abingdon: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), p.180.

relationship with God. Even when a person craves their continued existence into eternity, they approach their Self as a temporal Self, by craving the continuation of the temporal identity that they have created for themselves.<sup>520</sup> According to Kierkegaard, this approach is misguided, for nothing temporal is able to exist in eternity. As such, attachment to one's existence prevents one from achieving liberation, creating a gulf between the individual and God. By the same token, the Buddhist notion of *bhava-taṇhā* indicates that attachment to the Self is an obstacle to liberation and prevents a person from realising the true nature of reality. Despite their theological differences, both Kierkegaardian philosophy and the teachings Pāli texts advocate that attachment to one's existence is an obstacle to the discovery of the true nature of reality, which enslaves one to the temporal world.

### The Third Noble Truth and Kierkegaard's Model of Liberation

The final section of this chapter will focus on how Kierkegaard and the Pāli texts approach liberation from suffering, and will compare and contrast what, as I argue, are their respective two-tiered approaches of emancipation from the temporal world. I will again return to Kierkegaard's *Evangeliet om Lidelser* and his *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler* [*Concluding of the Unscientific Postscript*] (1846), as these texts provide a clear outline of Kierkegaard's discussions of a person's need to overcome their temporal nature. These texts therefore elaborate on the significance of 'turning inward', for rejecting the pleasures of the material world and relating to God. It is through the relationship with God, as I shall demonstrate, that a person—according to Kierkegaard—

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<sup>520</sup> This is evident in the Judge's belief that he will remain united with his wife throughout eternity—thereby regarding the afterlife as a continuation of his current identity and existence.

discovers the capacity to perceive the true nature of reality, and thereby recognises that the temporal world is void of substance, and unworthy of their attachment—for only God is. This idea encapsulates Kierkegaard’s notion of a person’s initial liberation from the temporal world, where he or she is subsequently able to overcome those experiences that I have previously characterised as human suffering. Through this approach to liberation, Kierkegaard establishes a philosophy that has, as I shall argue, strong parallels to the Pāli texts presentation of the Third Noble Truth: *nirodha*. This is because *nirodha* advocates that a complete cessation of suffering is possible,<sup>521</sup> if one can overcome the *avijjā* that fuels the three root poisons. For, as I shall discuss throughout the rest of this chapter, *nirodha* is closely associated with the attainment of enlightenment or *nibbāna* (blowing out), and, as such, it expresses the human potential to recognise that the material world lacks substance, with all phenomena subject to *pratītyasamutpāda*. I have already shown that Kierkegaardian and Buddhist philosophy argue that it is possible for us to free ourselves from the sufferings that are caused by our attachments to the material world (see pages 161-219). Both systems of thought recognise, therefore, that it is possible to realise the true nature of reality during our lifetime, and able, subsequently, to experience an existence free from the sufferings of craving and attachment.

I shall argue that while Kierkegaard’s first model of liberation exhibits similarities to the Buddhist notion of *nirodha*, whilst his second model is in stark contrast to Buddhist teachings found within the Pāli texts. This is because Kierkegaard’s second model maintains that liberation is achieved after a person’s death, and it refers, therefore, to the complete

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<sup>521</sup> It should be noted here, that although *nirodha* is often discussed as the ‘cessation of all suffering’, the term does not indicate that it is possible to overcome certain forms of suffering whilst still alive and therefore part of the cycle of *samsāra*. This is to say that one may suffer physical ailments such as hunger, exhaustion and sickness. What *nirodha* indicate is that it is possible to overcome one’s desires and one’s perception of themselves which is at the route of general dissatisfaction that characterises human life.

eradication of sufferings, both generically human and specifically Christian. According to Kierkegaard, the complete eradication of suffering is achievable only when one has been granted access to eternity, with the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. This second form of liberation is equivalent to a metaphysical existence, characterised by the eternal joy of a close relationship to God. This model is in stark contrast to the teachings of the Pāli Canon which presents the final liberation that is itself explained through the concept of *parinibbāna* (the final blowing out or extinction). *Parinibbāna* is achieved by enlightened beings at the point of death, where, in their awakened status, they are freed from the cycle of *saṃsāra* and are no longer subject to rebirth. The concept of *parinibbāna* will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, however, it should be noted here that the exact nature of *parinibbāna* is complex, with the majority of definitions tending to focus on the manner in which this final extinction signifies the end of the five aggregates, and all of the “physical and mental phenomena that constitute a being”.<sup>522</sup> In this way, *parinibbāna* is regarded as the extinction of one’s current state of being, and is thus in direct conflict with Kierkegaard’s understanding of the essence of a person (the Christian soul), which continues to exist within the heavenly realm for all of eternity. In Kierkegaard’s model the liberated being remains connected to their previous existence, and still therefore maintains a sense of spiritual identity, whereas, within the model presented within the Pāli Canon, the previous identity (defined in Buddhist terms as the co-location of the five aggregates in flux) is completely eradicated.

Both systems of thought advocate the view that the complete liberation of suffering is attainable only upon death. However, there remain distinct differences in their respective

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<sup>522</sup> Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p.76.

conceptions of this, due to their different approaches to the concepts of God and the existence of an eternal Self. Likewise, for Kierkegaard, if a person is to be completely liberated from both forms of suffering (human and Christian) that he describes, they must submit themselves to the grace of God; they cannot achieve this through human endeavour alone. The Buddhist approach to enlightenment, as presented in the Pāli texts, contrasts with Kierkegaard's model as it remains a product of human endeavour. Thus, while both systems of thought maintain that the first stage of liberation is achieved through one's own efforts, for Kierkegaard, the second liberation is achieved through an act of divine benevolence.

Kierkegaardian scholar, Winfield Nagley began his 1959 publication entitled *Kierkegaard on Liberation* by maintaining that, according to Kierkegaard, "Self-fulfilment can come only through a form of withdrawal from the world".<sup>523</sup> Here Nagley addresses Kierkegaard's approach to a person's initial liberation, which, I shall now refer to as the liberation from human suffering. Nagley continues to note that, in accordance with Kierkegaard's collective writings, each individual is charged with the task of freeing themselves from the entanglements of the temporal world, in order to recognise that this is the only viable approach to maintaining relationship with God.<sup>524</sup> For Kierkegaard, if a person is to relate appropriately to God, they must first eradicate all attachments to the temporal world, and abandon the belief that the material world is inherently meaningful; and as I discussed in Chapter Two (see pages 81-88), this eradication involves not only material luxuries but also one's sense of Self. A person is therefore required to humble themselves before God, without the possibility of approaching God with an inflated sense of Self; rather, they must

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<sup>523</sup> Winfield E. Nagley, 'Kierkegaard on Liberation', in *Ethics* vol.70, no.1 (1959), p.47.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid*, pp.47-49.

recognise that their current status lacks substance, and that it is only through living in relation with God that their lives become meaningful. This notion is summarised by Kierkegaard in his claim that the individual must recognise that before God they are always “unconditionally guilty”.<sup>525</sup> In making this claim, Kierkegaard asserts that even the most pious of people—those who have dedicated their lives to following the example of Christ, by caring for the poor and honouring God—must recognise themselves as wholly unworthy before God. This is because, by taking pride in one’s accomplishments or believing oneself to be worthy on the basis of one’s Christian faith, demonstrates personal attachment to one’s identity or sense of Self. As Kierkegaard claims: one cannot be “a soldier of fortune that embarks on an adventure in life and leaves doubtful”,<sup>526</sup> meaning that in order to give oneself completely to God, one must first have sacrificed all temporal attachments, or one will be continually plagued with doubts that keep one grounded in temporal life, unable to obtain eternity.

From the points raised so far, two key matters become clear. Firstly, to receive the grace of God and become liberated from all suffering, a person must first *endeavour to liberate themselves* from human suffering. Secondly, the path to liberation from human suffering is a difficult and demanding path, which requires one to eradicate all temporal desires—even overcoming one’s sense of Self.<sup>527</sup> As I explained in my discussions about the aesthete (see pages 180-202) and the ethicist (see pages 202-219), Kierkegaard maintains that the majority of people will lead a life rooted in temporal concerns—be they sensual pleasures or their own continued existence. These concerns provide a framework for life, providing

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<sup>525</sup>Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.285.

<sup>526</sup>Ibid, p.288.

<sup>527</sup>This second point is clearly alluded to by Kierkegaard who claims that “the road of perfection is walked in hardships” Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.292. Thus, Kierkegaard recognises the difficulties the individual faces in eradicating everything which they know.



humanity with direction. However, as I also explained, a person's tendency to seek out sensory pleasures or the continuation of their existence, leads to suffering and dissatisfaction. Thus, the temporal world becomes both one's motivation in life and one's tormentor. To escape this uniquely *human* suffering, Kierkegaard claims that the individual must be willing to recognise the source of pleasure that gives them their sense of purpose is also the cause of their continuous dissatisfaction. Furthermore, each person must be prepared to sacrifice that which they had, until this point in time, regarded as the very structure and guidance in their lives, with no guarantee that they will find the support they need to provide lasting satisfaction. This sacrifice, for Kierkegaard, is the very foundation for his all-important *third sphere of existence*: that of the *religious life*.

The term 'religious' here, does not designate one who attends church or conforms to the established religious dogma of society, rather, it refers to one who is able to cast off the shackles of all temporal phenomena (including that of the Church), and live a life that is directed towards God, without guarantees that they are doing the right thing. As George Leone notes, the religious individual is one who returns to God, in full recognition that the temporal is meaningless to them.<sup>528</sup> Equally, the religious individual is not concerned with the continuation of their own existence, having no attachment to their sense of identity. The religious individual is one who is opposed to the plights of both the aesthete and the ethicist; the religious person lives simply for God, having overcome temporal cravings, and living in continuous devotion to God. As I will explain later in this chapter, Kierkegaard's presentation of the religious individual reveals similarities to the Pāli teachings concerning the ideal of the enlightened being, known within the Pāli tradition as the *arahat* —a term

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<sup>528</sup>Leone, *Kierkegaard's Existentialism: The Theological Self and the Existential Self*, p.26.

that originates with the Sanskrit term *varh*, which is employed in the *Rgveda* to denote a sense of deserving.<sup>529</sup> The *arahat* is discussed within the Pāli texts as being the “one who is worthy”: an individual who has liberated themselves from worldly attachments to recognise the true nature of reality.<sup>530</sup> In this way, both the *arahat* and Kierkegaard’s notion of the religious are individuals who have been able to overcome their temporal desires, who perceive the material world as a place empty of substance, and who are able to master their own minds.

The religious individual overcomes human suffering by preventing themselves from being attached to the temporal world. However, this, in turn, can initiate a new form of suffering—that which I have previously called Christian suffering (see pages 75-81). To recall, Christian suffering expresses a person’s isolation from society, and their alienation at being mocked for their choices—either for sacrificing their temporal pleasures or being condemned for not conforming to the rituals and regulations of the Church. While these experiences in themselves would not necessarily be considered expressions of *suffering* for those who have overcome their attachments to the temporal world, Kierkegaard infers that such experiences still affect the religious individual because they can create an element of doubt and uncertainty in the individual’s mind, and thereby cause them continually to have to battle to affirm their faith.<sup>531</sup> This sense of doubt stems from the fact that the religious individual has no definitive proof that God has accepted their sacrifice of the temporal world, and no objective way of knowing that they are in a relationship with God. The scorn which they subsequently face from society can intensify their doubts, causing them to

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<sup>529</sup> D. W. Whitney, *Roots, Verb-forms and Primary Derivatives of the Sanskrit Language* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1997), p.4.

<sup>530</sup> Nathan Katz, *Buddhist Images of Human Perfection: The Arahant of the Sutta Piṭaka Compared with the Bodhisattva and the Mahāsiddha* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2004), p.1.

<sup>531</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, pp.219-223.

question—as Christ did on the cross—God’s intentions for them. Kierkegaard compares this kind of suffering to “a tree that bears useless fruit”,<sup>532</sup> to convey the existential dilemma that faces those in the religious sphere. Within the religious sphere, a person is freed from the temporal sufferings that encounter the vast majority of humans, and are subsequently liberated from the general dissatisfactions of life, but their eternal desires are heightened, causing them to suffer from unrequited desires which they are powerless to overcome. This powerless state is due to the fact that, according to Kierkegaard, only through the grace of God can one find total liberation, such that, a person is unable to liberate themselves, even after they have successfully managed to sacrifice themselves to God as an act of devotion to him.

It is important to note here that there is a difference between Kierkegaard’s two-tiered model of liberation and that of the Buddha. Thus, within the Pāli texts, it is taught that when a Buddhist practitioner becomes an *arahat*, they are fully awakened, for they have abandoned all forms of *taṇhā*, and subsequently escaped *saṃsāra*. This means that, at the point of enlightenment, a person’s quest for liberation is complete, for they have attained *nibbāna* (complete extinction) and won’t be reborn. Thus, in spite of the fact that the *arahat* continues to exist within *saṃsāra* until the end of their physical existence, they are assured that, following their physical life, they will not be subject to a future rebirth. The dual nature of *nibbāna* is apparent in the notions of *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna* (*nibbāna* with remainder) and *an-upādisesa-nibbāna* (*nibbāna* without remainder, or final *nibbāna*, also called *parinibbāna*). As I will discuss in detail later in this chapter (see pages 235-240), *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna* denotes a state where a person has extinguished the three root poisons

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid, p.264.

of hatred, greed and delusion, and yet continues to exist due to the physical continuation of their body. By contrast, *an-up ādisesa-nibbāna* or *parinibbāna* signifies a “discarnate or disembodied state”<sup>533</sup> that occurs after death—a state in which a person is completely free from *samsāra* and all associated experiences of *dukkha*. What remains significant about the approach to liberation, as found within the Pāli texts, is that both states of *nibbāna* are unlocked the moment one attains enlightenment, meaning that as soon as a person has become awakened, their desires are completely eradicated. In Kierkegaard’s model, however, a person does not achieve both tiers simultaneously. In other words, within Kierkegaard’s model a person does not eradicate all ignorance after he or she has overcome attachments to the temporal world, for they haven’t obtained objective knowledge of God’s existence and remain guided by faith, uncertain of the validity of their sacrifice. The Pāli teachings are in stark contrast to this, as the first liberation involves the overcoming of ignorance, and the acquisition of complete knowledge about the nature of reality; the second liberation, in this respect, is merely an ending to the physical suffering that this knowledge on its own is unable to eradicate. From this, I can conclude that, unlike Kierkegaard’s religious individual, the *arahat* can achieve complete objective knowledge, ensuring their total liberation at the point of physical death. The *arahat* is the one who has experienced *nibbāna* fully, and no longer needs to strive to obtain liberation. The religious individual, by contrast, has only partially attained enlightenment, and continues in their quest for complete liberation.

It is already evident that the relationship between Kierkegaard’s understanding of liberation and the Buddhist goal of *nibbāna* is a complex one, owing to Kierkegaard’s approach to

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<sup>533</sup> Prebish & Keown, *Introducing Buddhism*, p.50.

liberation having two distinct dimensions or tiers. I have already demonstrated how Kierkegaard's final tier contrasts with Buddhism (and the Pāli teachings concerning *an-upādisesa-nibbāna*), owing to its roots in divine grace. However, I shall now reveal how a meaningful parallel does exist between Kierkegaard's first tier of liberation and *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna*. As we shall see, Kierkegaard's first tier and *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna* are both acquired through mental discipline—through a strengthening of the mind that overcomes all forms of desire (*taṇhā*) and ultimately finds lasting satisfaction. By illustrating the parallels between Kierkegaard's first model of liberation and *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna* I intend to reveal that the similarities that exist between the teachings of the Pāli Canon and Kierkegaard are not limited to comparisons concerning *angest* or suffering. They are, as I shall show, present even in the more theological aspects of Kierkegaard's work. As such, I will show that the comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism are relevant, not only within the field of comparative philosophy, but also comparative theology.

Kierkegaard's distinction between the religious individual and the one who adheres to the traditions of the established Church is illustrated in his work *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler* [*Concluding of the Unscientific Postscript*]. Through the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard condemns those individuals who attempt to balance the demands of the Christian life with worldly pleasures. Specifically, he reviles “the pastor” (a symbol of the established Church) for asserting that the difficult path—which signifies the difficulties of a life dedicated to spiritual pursuits—can lead to temporal

benefits.<sup>534</sup> Barrett (2010) suggests that Kierkegaard is alluding here to Matthew 7:13-14, which proclaims:

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

In this context, it is clear that Kierkegaard regarded the pleasures of the temporal world as ambiguous—appearing at first to improve or advance our existence, while actually leading us to dissatisfaction, with its fleeting nature. Thus, whilst the “wide gate” may give us the impression of pleasure, its impermanent status will always end in loss or dissatisfaction. This contrasts with the “narrow gate”, which represents Kierkegaard’s religious mode of existence—a path characterised by inwardness and the denial of worldly pleasures. As such, Kierkegaard asserts that the temporal and spiritual are two distinct approaches to life, and, for those who enter the religious mode of existence, there must be a willingness to sacrifice their relationship with the temporal to approach God. Kierkegaard suggests that no temporal benefits can result from taking the “narrow path”, for the narrow path is the path of sacrifice—a path in which all bonds with the temporal world are eradicated to enable experience of the eternal. The pastor of the *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler* is, therefore, in an erroneous position, for the reward of taking the “narrow path” entails liberation from the temporal world, and freedom from worldly desires and cravings.

This important idea is also apparent in *Evangeliet om Lidelser*. There Kierkegaard writes:

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<sup>534</sup>Barrett, ‘The Sermon on the Mount: The Dialectic of Exhortation and Conclusion’, p.46.

In eternity, you will not be asked how large a fortune you left behind - the survivors ask about that; or about how many battles you won, about how sagacious you were, how powerful your influence..... No, eternity will not ask about what *worldly things* remain *behind you* in the world. But it will ask about what riches you have gathered in heaven, about how often you have conquered your own mind, about what control you have exercised over yourself or whether you have been a slave, about how often you have mastered yourself in self-denial.<sup>535</sup>

Kierkegaard therefore suggests that liberation from suffering is achieved through the “conquering [of] your own mind”.<sup>536</sup> For Kierkegaard this means the ability to perceive temporal objects and experiences is devoid of inherent meaning. The parallels with Kierkegaard’s work and the teachings of the Pāli texts are clearly evident here, for Kierkegaard presents a similar viewpoint by asserting that one must be able to master one’s mind and keep it away from the confusions caused by desire. The ability to calm the mind is central to both systems of thought. This is made clear in the Pāli texts, which supports the notion that three steps of the *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko magga* (noble eightfold path) are concerned with *samādhi* (meditation). The significance of this is highlighted by Bhikkhu Bodhi (2010), who asserts that enlightenment can only be attained by the one who possesses clarity of mind; for insight into the true nature of being requires mental strength.<sup>537</sup> Bodhi continues to note that one must develop the ability to control the mind, and prevent it from becoming overcome by desire or emotion. Further reinforcement for this important point in the *Dhammapada* (225), where the Buddha compares an individual’s ability to control the mind

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<sup>535</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, pp.223-224.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

<sup>537</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010), p.65.

to that of a skilled charioteer. Here, the Buddha likens the charioteer's ability to direct his horses with the individual's ability to control their mind, thereby inferring that through meditative practice a person can keep calm and “keep their body under self-control”.<sup>538</sup> The Buddha’s teachings here clearly reflect that of Kierkegaard’s, when Kierkegaard states:

When a team of horses is to pull a heavy load ahead, what can the driver do for them? Indeed, he cannot pull it himself, and the second-rate driver can whip them – anyone can do that – but the competent driver, what can he do for them? He can help them get on the move pulling the wagon in a single instant with concentrated strength in a single pull.<sup>539</sup>

Both systems of thought clearly advocate the importance of mental strength. Although Kierkegaard does not advocate the practice of meditation, he maintains the need for a person to remain in control of their thoughts and feelings. In similar terms to the Buddha, Kierkegaard asserts that one needs to develop the mental strength to overcome temporal cravings and to focus one’s attention on the limitations of the temporal world. According to Michael Weston (2008), it is in his rejection of the temporal world, that Kierkegaard’s twofold interpretation of suffering comes to the fore, because it is through one’s attachments to earthly pleasures that a new form of suffering becomes apparent—the second form: the kind of suffering experienced exclusively by Kierkegaard’s ideal of a faithful Christian.<sup>540</sup> This, as I have discussed at length, is the suffering the Christian experiences in his or her isolation from the community, an isolation that becomes apparent after one has sacrificed earthly pursuits. However, once the Christian has chosen to live a

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<sup>538</sup> *The Dhammapada: The Path of Perfection*, p.65.

<sup>539</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.295.

<sup>540</sup> Michael Weston, ‘Kierkegaard, Levinas, and “Absolute Alterity”’, in *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion*, J. Aaron Simmons & David Wood (eds) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p.164.



religious life, he or she is able to recognise this suffering—like all temporal phenomena—is fleeting, and can be overcome through sacrificing their place and identity within the temporal world. As Kierkegaard notes, one must harness the “spirit of self-control”,<sup>541</sup> overcome one's “fantasies” and “passions”,<sup>542</sup> if one is to find release from temporal suffering.

According to Kierkegaard, by approaching their life in this way, the Christian acquires the strength of mind to reject temporal pleasures, and to divert their attention from finite issues to the infinite. By recognising the futility of temporal phenomena, the Christian is able to focus their mind on to their infinite attributes, recognising their abilities to move beyond the limitations of the created world in order to strive to experience the eternal. In this respect, they are able to reaffirm their choice to sacrifice the material world, as they recognise that this surrender enables them to grasp the true substance of reality and the lasting pleasure of relationship with God.<sup>543</sup> It is this approach to life that Kierkegaard characterises as “martyrdom”<sup>544</sup> in his private writings, thereby suggesting that by living a life characterised by renunciation and asceticism, one is able to transform one's approach to life so that their will imitates God's will.

Existentialist, Samuel Hugo Bergman (1991) develops this point by highlighting this approach to life as demanding and difficult, and one that must be freely chosen. Should one be forced to sacrifice one's worldly commitments and indulgences—be this through circumstance or pressure from another person—one will not be able to contemplate the

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<sup>541</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.323.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid, p.322.

<sup>543</sup> Weston, ‘Kierkegaard, Levinas, and “Absolute Alterity”’, p.164.

<sup>544</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers: Autobiographical, Volume 6, Part 2, 1848-1855*, Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (eds & trans) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp.51-52.

transitory nature of the material world. This is because there is no sincere desire to sacrifice one's attachments, but, rather, one does so as an inevitable result of a particular set of conditions. This would mean that one's abandonment of temporal phenomena was not a true sacrifice undertaken freely, and, as such, there is no guarantee that one would reject again the fleeting pleasures of temporal phenomena should one's situation happen to change.<sup>545</sup> Equally, Bergman highlights that one must have experienced the pleasures of the temporal world if one is able to reject them, for one must be aware of the power of finite pleasures if one's sacrifice of them is to have meaning.<sup>546</sup> In making this important claim, Bergman highlights the fact that this initial Kierkegaardian process of liberation from human suffering is entirely individualistic, whilst the second stage of liberation, according to Kierkegaard, is a product of divine grace. As I have already established, the individual is first required to make a sacrifice—and must choose to abscond from the temporal world and learn to master their own mind.<sup>547</sup> Importantly, this does not mean that a person is required to discover the path for themselves, for as I shall explain in Chapter Five (see pages 275-278), Kierkegaard maintains that true Christians should be inspired by the example (*eksempel*) of Christ, following his teachings (*læren*) in order to aid them in their own quest for liberation. Nevertheless, it remains the person's decision to choose (*vælge*) to follow Christ's example; they must willingly embrace the hardships of practising true Christianity (by, as I've explained, focusing their mind to overcome their temporal desires). As such, Kierkegaard contends that the path to liberation from human suffering remains an individualistic pursuit, where one *chooses* to embrace Christ as a guide for making the

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<sup>545</sup> Samuel Hugo Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy from Kierkegaard to Buber*, Arnold A. Gerstein (trans) (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p.89.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

<sup>547</sup> As Kierkegaard notes "it has to go through the person who is himself involved. The adult is indeed of age; he is to be his own master" Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.294.

required sacrifices, but, ultimately, making the sacrifice themselves. It is only once they have proven themselves, by overcoming human suffering through their own endeavour, that they will be deemed worthy of the grace of God, and complete liberation from all forms of suffering.

Owing to its theological associations, Kierkegaard's approach to the liberation of human suffering may seem at first to be in complete contrast with Buddhism. Unlike Kierkegaard's model, liberation approached from the perspective of Pāli texts is understood in more secular or psychological terms.<sup>548</sup> Despite this, however, I shall demonstrate that the approaches to liberation that are recognised by these distinct systems of thought possess considerable parallels, owing to both asserting that each individual person possesses the potential to overcome the desires or cravings that keep them bound to the temporal world. As I have already established, the human capacity to liberate oneself from *dukkha* is that part of the Third Noble Truth called *nirodha*—a term often translated as 'cessation', which thereby implies that the Third Noble Truth is the path to the cessation of *dukkha*.<sup>549</sup>

According to Paul Williams, *nirodha* is linked to *nibbāna* in so far as “the complete cessation of suffering is *nibbāna*”.<sup>550</sup> By making this connection, Williams emphasises the Third Noble Truth as the definitive goal of Buddhist practitioners.<sup>551</sup> This goal is achieved through the eradication of *avijjā*, and by recognising the conditioned state of all temporal phenomena, for in such a state of mind, a person has become seized by the *dhamma*, enabling them to penetrate into reality, and thereby abandoning the fetters that keep the person bound to

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<sup>548</sup> Duane R. Bidwell, 'Practicing the Religious Self: Buddhist-Christian Identity as Social Artifact', in *Buddhist-Christian Studies* vo.28, no.1 (2008), p.5.

<sup>549</sup> The Buddha teaches in the *Saccasamyutta* (SN 56:11), for instance: “Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, nonreliance on it” *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1844.

<sup>550</sup> Williams, with Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction*, p.47.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

the material world and enable them to discover serenity (*dhamma-uddhacca-viggahitaṃ mānasam hoti*).<sup>552</sup>

I have already established that *nibbāna* in Buddhism is both a state that is realised during one's lifetime—when one awakens to the truth of reality, becoming an *arahat*—as well as a state entered into after death, ensuring that one is not reborn into the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Of the two types of *nibbāna*, it is the first one—*sa-upādisesa-nibbāna* (*nibbāna* with remainder)—that is comparable to Kierkegaard's first model of liberation. This is because, in similar respect to Kierkegaard's model, *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna* is a state in which the ignorance that underpins desire is overcome, and the temporal world is seen as empty of substance and incapable of providing lasting satisfaction. This is reflected in the Buddha's teachings contained in the *Mūlapariyāya Sutta* (MN 1:51) as follows:

Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu who is an arahant with taints destroyed, who has lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, destroyed the fetters of being, and is completely liberated through final knowledge, directly knows earth as earth. Having directly known earth as earth, he does not conceive [himself as] earth, he does not conceive [himself] in earth, he does not conceive [himself apart] from earth, he does not conceive earth to be 'mine' he does not delight in earth. Why is that? Because he has fully understood it, I say.<sup>553</sup>

It is clear from this passage that *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna* is the complete eradication of the three root poisons (*akusala-mūla*) of delusion (*moha*), attachment (*rāga*) and hatred (*dosa*), and as such, it refers to the fact that the factors that have kept one bound to *saṃsāra* have

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<sup>552</sup> 'Catukkanipāta' (AN 4:170), in *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, p.535.

<sup>553</sup> *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp.87-88.

been extinguished. Support for this idea is found in the *Ādittapariyāya Sutta*, where the three poisons are likened to the flames that ignite *samsāra*, and *nibbāna* is comparable to the extinguishing of these flames. As the Buddha notes in the *Saḷāyatanaṣaṃyutta* (SN 35:28), “Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being”.<sup>554</sup> By attaining *nibbāna*, the individual is completely transformed, and no longer subject to delusion, attachment and hatred; their actions are pure, and no longer subject to the acquisition of *kamma*.<sup>555</sup> Scholar of Theravāda Buddhism, Ellison Banks Findly (1999) characterises such a person as possessing the perfections of wisdom and morality, ensuring they “exhibit fully realised moral conduct”,<sup>556</sup> or the moral pillars of the *saṅgha*.

The *arahat* remains in control of the mind, preventing it from becoming consumed by *taṇhā*, and ensuring the person’s actions remain pure.<sup>557</sup> The *arahat* is one who, in line with *magga*, has attained the correct attitude or view (*sammā-samādhī*), and, thus, the seven factors of enlightenment (*satta bojjhaṅgā*)—namely, mindful alertness, investigation of *dhamma*, vigour, joy, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity.<sup>558</sup> In the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa (2011) identifies precisely these seven factors as those that enable an individual to take control of their mind and to master the meditative practices that allow

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<sup>554</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1143.

<sup>555</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, ‘Women and the “Arahant” Issue in Early Pāli Literature’, in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* vol.15, no.1 (1999), p.58.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>557</sup> Rupert Gethin, ‘On the Relationship of Calm and Insight’, paper presented at *4th International Buddhist Conference: Buddhist Contributors to Good Governance and Development*, Buddhamonthon Auditorium, Nakhon Pathom and at the United Nations Convention Center, Bangkok, May 2007, p.131. Paper retrieved from:

[https://www.academia.edu/27993361/Buddhist\\_Contributions\\_to\\_Good\\_Governance\\_and\\_Development](https://www.academia.edu/27993361/Buddhist_Contributions_to_Good_Governance_and_Development). A point supported by the Buddha’s teachings in *The Dhammapada* (378) which states that “The monk is said to be a Bhikkhu of peace when his body, words and mind are peaceful, when he is master of himself and when he has left behind the lower attractions of the world”, for more on this see *The Dhammapada* (1973).

<sup>558</sup> ‘*Bojjhaṅgasamyutta*’ (SN 46:5), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1574.

him or her to become completely absorbed in the final *jhāna*, a state beyond pleasure and pain where one attains complete composure.<sup>559</sup> In this way, the seven factors are presented as the means by which a person achieves self-mastery, and is able to direct their life through *choice* as opposed to being governed by their desires. It is by cultivating these factors that a person is able to transcend all temporal qualities, allowing their mind to become tranquil and concentrated, reaching a state of perfect equanimity,<sup>560</sup> a state that Buddhaghosa defines as:

It is the centring (*ādhāna*) of consciousness and consciousness-concomitants evenly (*samam*) and rightly (*sammā*) on a single object ... the state in virtue of which consciousness and its concomitants remain evenly and rightly on a single object, undistracted and unscattered.<sup>561</sup>

Thus, there are clear parallels here between Kierkegaard and the teachings found within Pāli literature, regarding the central role of mastery of one's mind.<sup>562</sup> Kierkegaard subsequently proposes that a person must practice mental discipline to conquer their desires.

A further point of comparison between the two, is that both the Pāli texts and Kierkegaard's philosophy contend that, after a person has overcome their desires for temporal phenomena, he or she continues to exist within the temporal world, so that, although the person is liberated from temporal attachments, he or she remains part of the conditioned

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<sup>559</sup> Bhaddantācariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, Bhikkhu Ñāṇāramoli (trans) (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2011), p.156.

<sup>560</sup> Richard Shankman, *The Experience of Samadhi: An In-depth Exploration of Buddhist Meditation* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2008), p.18.

<sup>561</sup> Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, p.82.

<sup>562</sup> In the context of Kierkegaard, see, for instance, Pattison, who notes that the weak mind from a Kierkegaardian perspective, "feels its incapacity and has to attempt to grasp objects". Thus, when one remains attached to the temporal world, one is overcome by desire, unable to restrain oneself. George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), p.87.

world. For Kierkegaard, this is because the person has yet to achieve full liberation, and is still required to prove their devotion to God. Within the Buddhist tradition, by contrast, this is because there remains a residue of the five aggregates which has yet to disaggregate. The aggregates remain as the final link to a person's previous unenlightened state, for while the mind is liberated, the temporal body still exists, and the person is still subject to *saṃsāra* until their death. This is exemplified within the Pāli texts through a conversation between the Buddha and his disciple Aggivessana Vacchagotta about the nature of existence. Here, the Buddha compares his enlightened state to that of a fire, suggesting that although the Buddha no longer identifies with his conditioned state, it still exists. The enlightened being is thus understood as one who has eradicated their sense of self, and has recognised that aggregates are simply temporal phenomena, however, so long as the aggregates remain, the impression of their previous existence also remains for the unenlightened being. As the Buddha states in the *Aggivacchagotta Sutta* (MN 72:20):

So too, Vaccha, the Tathāgata has abandoned that material form by which one describing the Tathāgata might describe him; he has cut it off at the root, made it like a palm stump, done away with it so that it is no longer subject to future arising.<sup>563</sup>

From this, it is clear to see that in this scenario the *arahat* is no longer fuelled by *taṇhā*, and the person is no longer deluded into believing in the concepts of 'I' and 'mine'. This person's continued existence within *saṃsāra* is understood as comparable to a fire, the embers of which are consuming the final bits of kindling. The existence of this enlightened person

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<sup>563</sup> *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, p.593.

within *samsāra* is waning, with only subtle associations remaining, before vanishing completely.

Psychologist, Eleanor Rosch (2007) maintains that the *arahat* is one who has recognised their identity or ego as something conditioned, and that their sense of 'I' was established through delusion, and that it is only through letting go of this perception that they have been able to eradicate their suffering.<sup>564</sup> Peter Harvey (2001) similarly maintains that within Buddhism, the attainment of *nibbāna* denotes the overcoming of the delusion of a permeant ontological self: of 'I' or 'mine'.<sup>565</sup> However, Harvey continues to note that despite the realisation that one does not possess a permanent self, the *arahat* still possesses an empirical self or character that remains until death. This empirical self differs from the deluded sense of self that is possessed by all unenlightened beings, in so far as it is developed out of *dhammic* principles, and is thus characterised by wisdom and compassion. The *arahat* is subsequently referred to as *bhāvit-atta*, meaning 'one of developed self', as this person has overcome their temporal identity to become a fully awakened being.<sup>566</sup>

The resonance with Kierkegaard's model here is strong. Both systems of thought understand that the enlightened person (to use the Buddhist term), after coming to realise the true nature of reality, remains in the temporal world. They are no longer enslaved by their desires, and are free from all forms of suffering that stem from their cravings for material objects and conceptions. The enlightened person from both systems of thought awaits complete liberation from the world and the final forms of suffering that they must endure due to the physical nature of their bodies, which inevitably remain (for Buddhists this is

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<sup>564</sup> Eleanor Rosch, 'More than Mindfulness: When You Have a Tiger by the Tail, Let It Eat You', in *Psychological Inquiry* vol.18, no.4 (2007), p.260.

<sup>565</sup> Harvey, *Buddhism*, p.102.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*



expressed in the notion of *dukkha-dukkha*). However, both the religious individual and the *arahat* have, through their own endeavours, freed themselves from the plight of craving. This is not to say that no differences exist between these two systems of thought, for clearly the religious individual, while free from temporal desire is still attached to their conception of God. I shall assess the relevance of these differences in the remainder of this chapter.

### An-up ādisesa-nibbāna and Kierkegaard's Final Liberation

The differences between the approaches to liberation proffered by Kierkegaard and the Pāli texts stem from their respective conceptions concerning the complete or final liberation—that is to say, Kierkegaard's conception of eternity and the Pāli teaching relating to *an-up ādisesa-nibbāna* (*nibbāna* without remainder) also known as *parinibbāna* (complete extinction). The difference here lies in both how the final liberation is attained and the exact nature of the liberation. This is because Kierkegaard advocates a theological approach to the final liberation, which is not rooted in the religious individual's own endeavours, but is granted through the grace of God. Likewise, Kierkegaard's Christian beliefs also influence his understanding of the final liberation, clothing it in terms of a heavenly afterlife. This contrasts with the Buddhist ideal, which is not understood as something that can be achieved separately to *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna*, as the Pāli texts infer that both forms of *nibbāna* are obtained concurrently—that is to say, once a person has acquired insight into the nature of reality that characterises *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna*, they have ensured that they are liberated from the cycle of rebirth (which is so fundamental to the concept of *an-up ādisesa-nibbāna*). Furthermore, unlike the personal afterlife, which is dominant within Kierkegaard's model, the Pāli texts do not explore the concept of *an-up ādisesa-nibbāna* in

personal terms. Accordingly, it becomes clear that, despite the fact that both systems advocate a two-tiered approach to liberation (with the second liberation being considered the complete eradication of suffering), the exact natures of these liberations are distinct within each system.

Kierkegaardian scholar, Julia Watkin (1990) highlights the fact that liberation from the temporal world and from suffering is an individual issue throughout Kierkegaard's writings, with great emphasis placed on the idea that liberation is achieved through a personal relationship with God.<sup>567</sup> This point is evident within *Evangeliet om Lidelser* [*The Gospel of Sufferings*], within Kierkegaard's discussion about a passage from the Gospel of Luke. The Biblical passage proclaims that "[w]e are receiving what our deeds deserve",<sup>568</sup> and within its Biblical context, it is thought to refer to secular law, as spoken by the robber who was crucified at the side of Christ. However, Kierkegaard argues that it has a deeper theological meaning that reflects the relationship between humanity and God. According to Kierkegaard, it expresses the individual's realisation that, before God, "a person always suffers as guilty",<sup>569</sup> owing to God's ability to perceive "into the heart's most secret nook".<sup>570</sup> That is to say, that humans cannot hide their sins from God, and must be ready to confess them, and to accept the will of God. In this way, a person is expected to humble themselves before God by accepting complete responsibility for their actions, for God recognises them as free beings who have chosen their own path. In this respect, it is not possible to claim ignorance for one's actions, and one cannot blame one's choices on external factors or pressures, because God sees a person's actions in terms of their personal

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<sup>567</sup> Watkin, 'Kierkegaard's view of death', p.74.

<sup>568</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.265.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid, p.266.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

choices, which is to say, according to whether they choose to act on external influences or to act as an individual.<sup>571</sup> Complete liberation, according to Kierkegaard, is achieved through the grace of God, open only to those who have expressed true devotion to God. In this way, complete liberation is rooted in faith, so that one has to transcend the temporal world, and temporal desires, but also through one's expression of love for the infinite. Eternity is ultimately achieved through sacrificing oneself to one's infinite nature; to transform one's will so that it expresses the will of God. True liberation is to be immersed in divine love. Thus, Kierkegaard asserts:

Just as in earthly life lovers long for the moment when they are able to breathe forth their love for each other, to let their souls blend in a soft whisper, so the mystic longs for the moment when in prayer he can, as it were, creep into God.<sup>572</sup>

While there may seem to be a point of similarity here between Kierkegaard's conception of complete liberation and that found within the Pāli texts, due to the fact that both maintain that the final liberation is attained through the complete eradication of one's sense of 'I' and 'mine'. However, it should be remembered that while the Buddhist model requires that a person recognise that the aggregates are conditioned and lack permanence, Kierkegaard suggests that only the finite aspect of humanity is impermanent, and that the spiritual aspect remains. Kierkegaard approaches his notion of the infinite as the "inner being" or "deeper Self",<sup>573</sup> which enables relation with God. The infinite aspect of humanity is presented as immortal and something that the religious individual seeks to amplify through their God-centred existence. This means that, unlike the Buddhist model, complete

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<sup>571</sup> Ibid, pp.264-288.

<sup>572</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.243.

<sup>573</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.337.

liberation for Kierkegaard is rooted in the discovery of one's eternal Self—something that a Buddhist must reject if they wish to attain enlightenment, according to the Pāli texts.<sup>574</sup>

In addition to this, the eternal life is presented by Kierkegaard as a distinct metaphysical realm. While Kierkegaard doesn't explain what the heavenly realm is like, there are several passages in *Evangeliet om Lidelser* that suggest he has a view on the matter. He alludes, for instance, to eternity as a place of "rejuvenation",<sup>575</sup> where one is free from the limitations of one's previous existence. Kierkegaard also refers to eternity as a place of "harmony"—a realm beyond temporal disagreements and discriminations; a realm of peace and fellowship, where every person experiences the joys of *agape*. The most common description of heaven found within this text is that it is a place of "happiness",<sup>576</sup> with, for instance, an entire chapter presented by Kierkegaard on how the "happiness of eternity outweighs even the heaviest temporal sufferings".<sup>577</sup> Kierkegaard's description here can be interpreted as a means of conveying hope to his readers, as the entire chapter functions as a means of justifying the suffering that a person—the reader—is forced to endure on the path to their liberation. Ultimately, eternity is perceived by Kierkegaard as a place of eternal reward for recognising God at the centre of one's life. This is seen in *Evangeliet om Lidelser* when Kierkegaard claims that on the day of judgement God will ask you:

how often you have conquered your own mind, about what control you have exercised over yourself or whether you have been a slave, about how often you have mastered yourself in self-denial or whether you have never done so, about how

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<sup>574</sup> Madhusudan Sakya, *Current perspectives in Buddhism: a world religion, Volume 1* (New Delhi: Cyber Tech Publications, 2011), p.6.

<sup>575</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.261.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid, p.306.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid, p.261.

often you in self-denial have been willing to make a sacrifice for a good cause or whether you were never willing.<sup>578</sup>

Kierkegaard's conception of hell is, by contrast, is complex. For instance, within his private writings following the death of Denmark's bishop, Jacob Mynster in 1854 he notes:

What the old bishop once said to me is not true—namely, that I spoke as if the others were going to hell. No, if I can be said to speak at all of going to hell then I say something like this: If the others are going to hell, then I am going along with them. But I do not believe that; on the contrary, I believe that we will all be saved and this awakens my deepest wonder.<sup>579</sup>

This proclamation, however, is in stark contrast to his published works that often allude to the idea of divine judgement and recompense, for instance in *Evangeliet om Lidelser*, the entire fourth chapter is founded on how one approaches judgement from God. In this manner, Kierkegaard clearly indicates that at the point of death the individual is forced to answer for their transgressions and that failure to do so can lead him or her to suffer in damnation.<sup>580</sup>

The theologian, Ronald F. Marshall (2013) claims that Kierkegaard was very familiar with the Lutheran Church's interpretation of hell, having been raised in the Church and having studied theology at the University of Copenhagen. From this, Marshall infers that Kierkegaard would have been familiar with the idea of hell as a place of wrath and vengeance, where one is torn away from God's grace for eternity. This conception of hell

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<sup>578</sup> Ibid, pp.223-224.

<sup>579</sup> Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers: Autobiographical, Volume 6, Part 2, 1848-1855*, p.557.

<sup>580</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.264-277.

contrasts with Kierkegaard's presentation of God as personal and responsive, a God who welcomes each person into personal relationship with him, and a God who promises forgiveness to those who seek it. Equally, the idea of being separated from God's grace for eternity contrasts with Kierkegaard's interpretation of Christ's sacrifice, which presents a benevolent God who sacrifices himself for all to enable their salvation.<sup>581</sup> Accordingly, Marshall implies that Kierkegaard may have purposefully chosen to exclude long descriptions of the torments of hell, as it detracts from the notion of an omnibenevolent God. Marshall therefore concludes that Kierkegaard believes in the existence of hell, given that if all are to be saved, there is no need to seek liberation; choosing a life of inwardness is a demanding and difficult road, and a wholly unnecessary one if all are guaranteed a place in heaven. Marshall maintains that Kierkegaard doesn't feel the need to speculate on the nature of hell, and hopes, instead, that the knowledge of what is expected of us by God will be enough to ensure that people remain faithful to him.<sup>582</sup> A similar point is made by Watkin, who argues that Kierkegaard's work clearly alludes to his acceptance of a "hell punishment",<sup>583</sup> for without this, an individual wouldn't need to turn inward to meet God's demands on them. Rather, they would be free to completely reject a relationship with God, which, as Watkin maintains, remains a possibility in theological models that proffer unlimited grace. Subsequently, both scholars conclude that Kierkegaard's perception of death and the afterlife must be understood in terms of divine reward and punishment, whereby the most righteous and dedicated are able to obtain a place in eternity, "by the grace and mercy of God".<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid, pp.270-274.

<sup>582</sup> Ronald F. Marshall, *Kierkegaard for the Church: Essays and Sermons* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013), p.210.

<sup>583</sup> Watkin, 'Kierkegaard's view of death', p.74.

<sup>584</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.271.

The difference between Kierkegaard's concept of eternity and *an-up ādisesa-nibbāna* are clear, for Kierkegaard's conception is understood as a distinct metaphysical realm, described as a place of infinite joy; Kierkegaard establishes that heaven exists with definable characteristics. This is in direct contrast with *an-up ādisesa-nibbāna*, which is described by Harvey (2001) as a profound and mysterious state, beyond the limitations of the unenlightened mind.<sup>585</sup> This point is supported by the fact that descriptions of *parinibbāna* within the Pāli Canon are often abstract, and expressed in negative terms, which is to say, what *parinibbāna* is not, rather than what it is. For instance, in the *Nibbāna Sutta* (UD 8:1), *parinibbāna* is presented as follows:

There is that dimension, monks, where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind; neither dimension of the infinitude of space, nor dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, nor dimension of nothingness, nor dimension of neither perception nor non-perception; neither this world, nor the next world, nor sun, nor moon. And there, I say, there is neither coming, nor going, nor staying; neither passing away nor arising: unestablished, unevolving, without support [mental object]. This, just this, is the end of stress.<sup>586</sup>

*Parinibbāna* is approached in negative terms, I contend, to ensure that it doesn't become identified with temporal phenomenon, and thus, with descriptions that place it firmly beyond all conceptions that remain part of the cycle of *saṃsāra*. For instance, in the passage above, *parinibbāna* is considered beyond all finite categorizations, reinforcing the notion that it is not a product of a temporal process. Hence, it is regarded as unconditioned,

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<sup>585</sup>Harvey, *Buddhism*, p.97.

<sup>586</sup> *Udāna: Exclamations, A Translation with an Introduction & Notes by Thanissaro Bhikkhu*, (Valley Center: Metta Forest Monastery, 2012), pp.111-112.

and not dependant on any other phenomena for its origin. As the Buddha, himself noted in the *Khandhasamyutta* (SN 22:59): “Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.”<sup>587</sup>

*Parinibbāna* is perceived as that which is beyond the *cattāro mahābhūtāni* (four great elements) of earth, fire, water and air, making it completely beyond *rūpa* or materiality. It is also beyond the four formless heavens, namely the realm of Boundless Empty Space, Realm of Boundless Consciousness, Realm of Nothingness and the Realm of Neither Thought Nor No Thought. This reveals that *parinibbāna* is intelligible only to fully enlightened beings. In this way, *parinibbāna* is presented as being beyond all *samsāric* realms of existence, for it surpasses the limitations of all conditioned realms, even those of the human and the divine beings. It exists beyond the cosmos and beyond the process of rebirth, without dependence on any external factors, and functioning according to “its own conditioning factors”.<sup>588</sup> It is therefore understood as the complete cessation of all *dukkha*, as it is the end of everything that is limited or unsatisfactory, thereby suggesting that it is characterised by unfettered joy.

From the characterisation of *parinibbāna* provided thus far, it is clear that the Buddhist conception lacks the personal element that is prevalent throughout Kierkegaard’s model. Similarly, Kierkegaard uses common parlance to express his ideas, such as ‘joy’ and ‘happiness’ to describe eternity, thereby providing brief descriptions that will engage his readers, and evoke in them the splendours of heaven. This makes Kierkegaard’s model much more relatable, for he attempts to qualify the existence of heaven through the

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<sup>587</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.903.

<sup>588</sup> Harvey, *Buddhism*, p.98.



analogy of basic human experiences. In Buddhism, the concept of *parinibbāna* is generally—although not exclusively—presented in a more apophatic manner, thereby preventing adherents to the Buddha’s teaching from associating the concept with conditioned existence. This is because *parinibbāna* is regarded as the “complete letting go”<sup>589</sup> of all conditioned phenomena that gives rise to *dukkha*. *Parinibbāna* is said to be void of all delusions, including the conception of a permanent ontological self. In light of this, scholar of Buddhism, Leonard Priestley (1999) notes that within the Pāli Canon *parinibbāna* is said to be beyond all temporal identities, meaning that the notion of ‘I’ or ‘mine’ can no longer be conceptualised by those who have attained the ultimate goal.<sup>590</sup> This is because all conceptions of a permanent self are the product of the five aggregates, and are thus a collection of conditioned physical and psychological states that are impermanent in nature, and subsequently confined to the realm of *saṃsāra*. The presentation of *parinibbāna* found within Pāli texts differs to Kierkegaard’s view of eternity as it remains an impersonal ultimate reality, while Kierkegaard’s model, by contrast, requires the existence of an eternal soul that enables a person to relate to the divine. In this way, Kierkegaard requires one only to let go of their temporal sense of identity, whilst embracing their spiritual one; which is to say, of recognising themselves as eternal beings who can recognise their own divinity. The Buddhist model is also an achievement of an individual’s effort, with a person having to conform to the eightfold path in order to attain the mental insight required for liberation. For Kierkegaard, however, this is not the case. For Kierkegaard, the individual has to demonstrate continual devotion to God, whilst being reliant on God’s grace for their final

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<sup>589</sup> Ibid.

<sup>590</sup> Leonard C. D. C. Priestley, *Pudgalavāda Buddhism: The Reality of the Indeterminate Self* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p.199.

salvation. This means that liberation is granted through God's love, which is not guaranteed of receiving, even if one remains dedicated to the religious life.

### Summary

Throughout Chapter Four I have clearly demonstrated that there are strong parallels between the collective works of Kierkegaard and both the Second and Third Noble Truths, thereby exposing new depths to the comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism that have been overlooked. I have firmly established the significant relationship between the concept of *taṇhā* and Kierkegaard's approach to human suffering, with both concepts recognising that desire is an obstruction to liberation, one that binds humanity to the temporal world and a life plagued by dissatisfaction. I have also exposed intriguing similarities between Kierkegaard's first model or tier of liberation and the Buddhist goal of *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna*, with both advocating that each individual has the potential to overcome suffering by mastering their own minds and overcoming their desires. By exposing these affinities, I have significantly developed the comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, revealing how the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism need not be confined to explorations of *angest* and *dukkha*, and that there are meaningful parallels between the two when the scope of their comparison is extended to include the more theological works of Kierkegaard.

## Chapter Five: The Role of Jesus and The Buddha

In the previous chapter, I established a firm parallel between Kierkegaard's conception of the origin of human suffering and the Buddhist understanding of *samudaya*. There I illustrated that both systems of thought maintain that suffering stems from human desire. There I also exposed points of similarity within the teachings of the Pāli Canon associated with *nibbāna* and Kierkegaard's approach to liberation. In this chapter I intend to further this comparison by examining the role of Jesus within Kierkegaard's model of liberation, for I contend that, throughout *Evangeliet om Lidelser* [*The Gospel of Sufferings*] Kierkegaard presents the figure of Christ in similar fashion to the presentation of the Buddha in the Pāli texts—which is to say, by focusing on Christ's human nature, Kierkegaard presents a figure who empathises with the sufferings of humanity. Therefore, Kierkegaard presents Christ as one who—akin to the Buddha—teaches from the position of his own *human* experiences, and not from divine authority. This is not to say, that I shall attempt to infer that the role of Christ in Kierkegaard's philosophy is identical to that of the Buddha in the Pāli Canon, for it must be remembered that Kierkegaard's philosophy is ultimately rooted in Christian Theology, and Kierkegaard's Christ inevitably links to the divine. However, as I shall make clear throughout this chapter, Kierkegaard's Christology is complex, with his attempt to shed light on the dual nature of Christ—his humanity and divinity. This duality is the heart of Kierkegaard's call to faith, with his assertion that humans cannot mediate between these two conflicting aspects of Christ, but, instead, must accept them as part of the divine 'mystery' of life. However, despite these theological assertions, I shall demonstrate how Kierkegaard ultimately envisions a Christ who, similarly to the Buddha, is presented (in various Pāli texts) as experiencing the pains of his own finite existence in order to guide others to their own liberation. In doing this, I shall establish a new area of comparison

between Buddhism and Kierkegaard—again by enforcing the point that there are more meaningful parallels to be made between the two than the works of De Silva, Elwood and Smith have suggested.

### Kierkegaard's Christology

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the significance of Jesus<sup>591</sup> within *Evangeliet om Lidelser*, it is vital, first, to explore the role of Christ more generally throughout Kierkegaard's works. This is owing to the fact that the significance of Christ to the practice of Christianity, is the only principle that appears throughout the majority of Kierkegaard's writings, not least, within both the signed and pseudonymous works, where it is established as a major component of his thinking. Accordingly, if one is to arrive at a realistic understanding of Kierkegaard's account of the role and character of Jesus, they would do well to examine how Jesus appears, and is used by Kierkegaard, throughout his works, and to understand these works as a development of Kierkegaard's unique Christology. It is imperative, therefore, for me to explore how Christ is understood across the breadth of Kierkegaard's writings as a general context, before making sense of select passages of *Evangeliet om Lidelser*. To appreciate the delicate relationship between Kierkegaard's Christ and the presentation of the Buddha within the Pāli Canon, one must first understand how Kierkegaard presents the relationship between God and Jesus, and moreover, the impact that this has on Kierkegaard's consideration of the humanity of Jesus. For, as I shall discuss

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<sup>591</sup> It should be noted here, that whilst other existential philosophers, such as Nietzsche have distinguished between the person of Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of faith, discussing Jesus in anthropological terms and Christ in theological. Kierkegaard never makes such a distinction, using the terms Jesus and Christ interchangeably throughout his writings. As such, I have decided to follow in the Kierkegaardian tradition and employ Jesus and Christ as synonymous with one another.

in detail later (see pages 260-263), Kierkegaard's theological approach to the nature of Jesus creates a point of tension between his philosophy and the teachings that are found within the Pāli literature, with the divinity of Christ contrasting to the anthropomorphic presentation of the Buddha found within the Pāli texts.

Theologian, Murray Rae (2010) asserts that when scholars approach Kierkegaard's Christology, they need to recognise his willingness to accept "Orthodox Christological confessions"<sup>592</sup><sup>593</sup> concerning the divine nature of Jesus. This acceptance is evident from texts such as *Philosophiske Smuler eller En Smule Philosophi* [*Philosophical Fragments*] (1844), where Kierkegaard, writing under his pseudonym Johannes Climacus,<sup>594</sup> frequently utilises New Testament vocabulary to refer to Jesus as 'God incarnate', and as 'the saviour' who has come to reconcile the relationship between God and his people. Throughout *Philosophiske Smuler eller En Smule Philosophi*, Climacus scarcely mentions Jesus by name, instead, referring to him as the ultimate revelation—as 'the god' through whom his followers can learn 'the truth'. In so doing, Climacus can be seen to present Jesus as the foundation of the Christian tradition, being both Godhead and teacher, who reveals the

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<sup>592</sup> Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard and Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), p.58.

<sup>593</sup> Orthodox Christology is rooted in the acceptance that Christ is both fully human and fully divine (*homoousios*). It holds that due to the entrance of sin into the world, humanity must act satisfactory before God. However, the sinful nature of humanity remains an obstacle to this: only a sinless individual can make resolution with God. As such, resolution is found only through the sacrifice of Christ, for Christ is both temporal and eternal. Only through Christ giving himself freely for sacrifice can the gulf between humanity and God be bridged. For more on this, for more on this see Carl S. Tyne (2003).

<sup>594</sup> Johannes Climacus is the pseudonymous author of both *Philosophical Fragments* and its accompanying text *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. Scholar, Jacob H. Sawyer (2015) has suggested that Johannes Climacus is named after a Seventh Century monk of the same name, who compare the act of Christian conversion to that act of climbing a ladder. Through this metaphor, he sought to suggest that, by walking up each rung, one develops a new virtue to help one move ever closer to God. Climacus, the monk, can be interpreted in similar light to Kierkegaard, in so far as both maintain that one makes a *choice* to form a relationship with God, and that this choice must be continually reaffirmed through one's commitment to live a Christian lifestyle based on the teachings and example of Christ. For more on this see Sawyer (2015).

path to eternity.<sup>595</sup> As will become apparent later in this chapter, it is Kierkegaard's emphasis on the divinity of Christ that establishes the most tension within this aspect of the relationship between Kierkegaardian scholarship and Buddhism. Indeed, within Kierkegaard's personal writings—published as *Journals and Papers*—clear allusions to the Trinitarian concept found in Nicene Creed; such as, “at every moment Christ is God just as much as he is man,”<sup>596597</sup> The Kierkegaardian scholar, Jon Stewart (2015) draws from such pronouncements that Kierkegaard recognises the nature of Jesus in terms of a paradox, thereby acknowledging that through the incarnation, God is both infinite and eternal, finite and temporal. Climacus presents God's incarnation and the reason for it—to enable God to reconcile with humanity—as *absurd*. Kierkegaard as Climacus writes:

What, then, is the absurd? The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into existence in time, that God has come into existence, has been born, has grown up, has come into existence exactly as an individual human being, indistinguishable from any other human being.<sup>598</sup>

Kierkegaard sought to challenge scholarly attempts to rectify this paradox,<sup>599</sup> by claiming that the human mind is incapable of comprehending the nature of the divine, for God transcends human rationality. This is evident from a journal entry where Kierkegaard writes:

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<sup>595</sup> Jon Stewart, *Søren Kierkegaard: Subjectivity, Irony, & the Crisis of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.133.

<sup>596</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, ‘Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers’, as found in: George W. Stroup, *Why Jesus Matters* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), p.94.

<sup>597</sup> The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is a principal belief of the Orthodox Church, founded on specific aspects of the Nicene Creed, which discuss God as existing as the Father, the Son and as the Holy Spirit. These ‘three persons’ of God are recognised as having distinct roles within the creation, while all remaining part of the same infinite being. For more on this see Robert A. Morey (1996).

<sup>598</sup> Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, p.176.

<sup>599</sup> This challenge is particularly focused on the work of Hegelians, who claimed that there are not absolute contradictions, that everything can be mediated.

[w]ould it not have an almost madly comical effect to portray a man deluded into thinking that he could prove that God exists – and then have the atheist accept it by virtue of the others proof. Both situations are equally fantastic.<sup>600</sup>

As such, Kierkegaard professed that only the true Christian can accept the paradox without searching for an objective or scientific explanation for it. For those who require external evidence to justify their belief can never truly accept the divine mystery of Christian faith. Ultimately, the doubts of such a person prevent them from turning to Christ as a prototype, and from imitating Christ's approach to the world. Therefore, to Kierkegaard, true Christianity is a practice that involves making a personal resolution to offer oneself to God, whilst shunning the temporal world, as Christ had done before. As Climacus proclaims: "Instead of the objective uncertainty, there is here the certainty that, viewed objectively, it is the absurd, and this absurdity, held fast in the passion of inwardness, is faith."<sup>601</sup> This quotation, clearly emphasises that Kierkegaard places great importance on individual faith, suggesting that relation with God is only possible through faith alone and not objective knowledge. And this emphasis is significant for it accentuates the difference between Kierkegaard and the Danish Church.<sup>602</sup> While both recognise the divine nature of Christ—thereby respecting the Trinitarian doctrines of the early Church—the Danish Church advocated that God became flesh in order to redeem all of humanity, and Kierkegaard, by

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<sup>600</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, 'Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, 111/3606 V B 40:11 n.d., 1844', as referenced in Rae, *Kierkegaard and Theology*, p.60.

<sup>601</sup> Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, p.176.

<sup>602</sup> Whilst Kierkegaard embraces an Orthodox approach to Christology, similar to that held by the Danish Church, in that he recognises the complete divinity and humanity of Christ and that these qualities are necessary in the redemption of humanity. He differs in his understanding of how the sacrifice leads to the liberation of man. For whilst the Danish Church held that man was redeemed through conforming to specific dogma, Kierkegaard places emphasis on the need to establish a personal relationship with God. This can only be achieved individually, and so requires one to first recognise their individuality and then dedicate their life to living as a single individual who remains true to the example of Christ. Thus, in spite of his acceptance of Orthodox Christology, his understanding of how this belief should impact the life of Christians remains in stark contrast with that of the recognised Church.

contrast, maintained that God sought incarnation as a single individual in order to establish personal relations with single individuals. That is to say, Kierkegaard believed that only as unique individuals, can a person formulate a meaningful relationship with God, through an awareness of inner growth and introspection.

As I discussed in Chapter Three (see pages 120-129), Kierkegaard insists that it is not through public ritual or Church dogma that the true Christian finds relationship with the divine, but through the revelation of Christ—and, furthermore, it is through this relationship that a Christian can recognise the significance of their own individuality. In other words, by following Christ's example, a person *chooses* to embrace the eternal world and reject the finite excesses of the material world. As Climacus asserts: "The presence of god in human form—indeed, in the lowly form of a servant—is precisely the teaching, and the god himself must provide the condition; otherwise the learner is unable to understand anything."<sup>603</sup>

From this notion, Rae infers that the focus of Kierkegaard's considerations of Christ is not to establish an objective inquiry into historical accounts of the life of Jesus, but, rather, to examine the philosophical, existential issue of "what is required of me?" as a Christian.<sup>604</sup>

Rae contends that Kierkegaard's notion of Christ is understood as the New Testament's presentation of Christ—a notion accepted by Kierkegaard without question to allow Kierkegaard to focus on what he construes as the more significant issue of "the individual's existential response to Christ".<sup>605</sup> Thus, for Kierkegaard, the crucial significance of Christianity is not something that is practised through theological speculation or conformity to the established Church; it is, rather, rooted in the individual's imitation of Christ, and

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<sup>603</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (eds & trans) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp.55-56.

<sup>604</sup> Rae, *Kierkegaard and Theology*, p.59.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.



their subsequent experience of personal suffering through their faith in Christ. The true Christian, therefore, accepts the revelation of the New Testament, recognising it as a source of divine authority, and superior to human intellect.

Kierkegaard's understanding of Christ is therefore ingrained in the theological acceptance of Jesus as being of one and the same nature as God. When Kierkegaard employs such terms as "teacher"<sup>606</sup> or "warrior" to describe Jesus in his guiding role—liberating individuals from their suffering—he is not thereby suggesting that such guidance is comparable to that which one may attribute to any teacher or warrior that has been recorded throughout human history—it is not, therefore, the kind of teaching one could ascribe to any human being, no matter how remarkable. Instead, Kierkegaard uses such terms to accentuate the divine nature of Christ—a warrior or teacher of a wholly different order: one "equal" no less "to God" himself.<sup>607</sup> By accentuating Jesus' divinity through his role as liberator and guide, Kierkegaard has been described by Christopher B. Barnett (2016) as advocating the *liberation from all forms of suffering*<sup>608</sup> as a divine gift, one that is revealed to humanity through the incarnation of God in Christ as an expression of his love for humankind.<sup>609</sup> Furthermore, Kierkegaard advocates that it is an act of faith to follow Jesus—as the only proper guide—along the path to liberation. And to follow Jesus in this way involves, Kierkegaard maintains, compels one to reject the temporal world, without assurance of divine assurance. It is a matter of pure faith.

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<sup>606</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.218.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid, p.220.

<sup>608</sup> It is important to note here that within his writings which focus on the divinity of Christ, Kierkegaard focuses almost exclusively on the final form of liberation, focusing on one attaining a heavenly afterlife through the grace of God. As will become apparent in this chapter, this is in contrast with his signed writings where he explores the human aspect of Christ. For within his exploration of the human aspect of Christ Kierkegaard tends to focus on the initial liberation from human suffering, presenting Christ as a guide who has revealed the means to liberation through his own efforts.

<sup>609</sup> Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, p.91.

As will be explored later in this chapter (see pages 264-265) the theological nature of Christ within Kierkegaard's writings places Christ in direct contrast with the presentation of the Buddha within select Pāli literature, such as *Sekha Sutta*, *Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta* and the *Khandhasaṃyutta*. For, as I will discuss shortly, one of the central tenets of the Pāli tradition is the humanity of the Buddha, which is taken to illustrate that all humans possess the ability to obtain liberation. That is to say, as was explored in the previous chapter (see pages 240-249), liberation is open to all humanity, as opposed to those who formulate a relation with some form of divine being. The contrast to Kierkegaard's model as presented so far, is clear, owing to Kierkegaard's insistence that Christ is understood in light of the Christian Trinity, meaning that he is recognised as equal to God. Therefore, if one accepts Rae's interpretation of Kierkegaard's Christology as correct (an interpretation I intend to challenge later within this chapter—see pages 273-285), Kierkegaard's notion of liberation from both human and Christian suffering is built on divine intervention, for Christ's teachings on the eradication of human suffering, should ultimately be recognised as being a product of divine revelation.

### Pāli Buddhology

Following this analysis of Kierkegaard's approach to the nature of Christ, it is clear that, there are substantial differences between Kierkegaard's theological approach to liberation and that of the approach presented in the Pāli Canon. These distinctions, I wish to argue, stem from the lack of theological assertions found within the Pāli texts.<sup>610</sup> For Buddhism is

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<sup>610</sup> As the scholar of comparative religion, Ninian Smart asserts: "if there is an ultimate in Theravāda it is not a God and not a Being", see Ninian Smart, *Ninian Smart on World Religions: Religious experience and*

*anissara*, which is to say, without a doctrine of the Lord; it is therefore regarded often as a non-theistic tradition. As scholar Richard Gombrich (2006) notes, Buddhist schools, particularly those who belong to the Theravāda tradition are often defined as a form of “religious individualism”,<sup>611</sup> as it purports that one is responsible for one’s own liberation—and, in so doing, it places itself in stark contrast with religions, such as Christianity, that postulate an ultimate divine guide for liberation, such as God, who guides his creation through divine revelation.<sup>612</sup> The interpretation of Buddhism as a form of religious individualism is rooted in the teachings of the Pāli Canon, where the Buddha proclaims in the *Dhammapada* (188-189), for instance: “Men in their fear fly for refuge to mountains or forests, groves, sacred trees or shrines.”<sup>613</sup> Passages such as this clearly indicate that the Buddha was not at all concerned with theological speculation or with the existence of a creator God. Moreover, as the scholar of Theravāda Buddhism, G. P. Malalasekera (1964)

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*philosophical analysis. I. Autobiographical. 'Methods in my life'*, John J. Shepherd (ed) (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), p.161.

<sup>611</sup> Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History*, p.53.

<sup>612</sup> It is important to note here that the absence of an infinite being who is responsible for both the creation and preservation of the cosmos, has according to the work of the scholar of Theravāda Buddhism, V.V.S Saibaba occasionally become confused by Westerners when they first approach Buddhism. This is due to the existence of *devas* (gods) within Buddhist cosmology. However, Saibaba asserts that the Pāli term *deva* does not denote an “absolute supernatural being transcending space and time”, as would be signified by the English term God. Rather the word *deva* literally means “a shining or radiant one”, referring to a celestial being of trans-human status. As follows *devas* are not approached within Buddhism as being creators or the primary cause of the cosmos and moreover are not ascribed the lofty characteristics frequently attributed to Deity, namely omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence. Subsequently, *devas* are not understood as immortal beings, but are held as existing within the cycle of *samsāra*, thus making them subject to the laws of *kamma* as is suggested by the Buddha in *Samyutta Nikāya* when he suggests that they too are imprisoned within the cycle of rebirth. Fundamentally, this means that the *devas* are subject to *anicca* and that their existence too shall end and they shall be subject to rebirth. From this it is apparent that the status of the *devas* is below that of a Buddha, for as is taught throughout the Pāli Canon the Buddha is the “all vanquishing sage”, who has released himself from the binds of *samsāra*, eradicating his *kammic* debt, to experience the unsurpassed joys of *nibbāna*. The *devas* however, remain subject to *kamma*, having yet to gain complete insight into the nature of reality, as such, they like all sentient beings, require the guidance of the Buddha in order to obtain enlightenment. This is made apparent in the *Catukkanipāta* (AN 4:23-24) where it is taught “Thus those devas and human beings, who have gone for refuge to the Buddha, having assembled, pay homage to him, the great one free from difference”. In this way, *devas* should not be understood in the same way as Christ is within Kierkegaard’s theological musings, for the Pāli texts do not recognise them as being infinite beings, but rather possessing conditioned existence like all sentient beings. For more on this see Saibaba (2005).

<sup>613</sup> *The Dhammapada: The Path of Perfection*, p.63.

has inferred, belief in a creator God would in fact be counterproductive in Buddhism, as it introduces a source of attachment. Indeed, Buddhism is not regarded as a “revealed religion”, as it is founded on the experiences and teaching of a human being, bound to the temporal world of human experience, rather than divine being.

The human nature of Buddhism is examined further by Malalasekera, in his characterisations of the historical Buddha. For example, he states that:

One of the most significant features of Buddhism is that its founder, the Buddha, was a man—an extraordinary one, it is true—and died as a man. Everything about him was unequivocally within the domain of Nature. What he had done, every other human being could do also, if he chose to and was prepared to make the requisite effort. The whole drama of salvation, as depicted by the Buddha, takes place on this earth, on the stage of life as lived in this world.<sup>614</sup>

From this, it is clear that Malalasekera recognises the humanity of the Buddha is imperative, for it reveals the universality of Buddhism. Unlike Kierkegaard’s model, Buddhism teaches that the path to liberation from suffering has been *discovered* by a *human* being, not the *revelation* of *divine* teachings. According to Malalasekera, this fundamental difference exposes a significant contrast between Buddhism and other religious institutions. This is because most of the so-called ‘major world religions’<sup>615</sup> all place divine revelation at the heart of their doctrines. Even Kierkegaard, as I have shown—as someone who explicitly rejected the orthodox Christian rituals and dogmas of his time—recognised the revelation of

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<sup>614</sup> G. P. Malalasekera, ‘The Status of the Individual in Theravāda Buddhism’, p.145.

<sup>615</sup> I use the collective term ‘major world religions’ to denote the six religions that are often collected together under such titles, namely, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. Whilst creator gods are a common feature of many of the previously stated world religions, Buddhism does not place the same emphasis on the existence of a divine entity who is considered responsible for the creation of the cosmos.

Christ as central to his faith. In this way, religions such as Christianity advocate the divine as central to a person's capacity to overcome themselves. Furthermore, with regards to Kierkegaard, it is evident that he characterised and understood human nature as rooted in suffering, and the overcoming of this nature as a personal relationship with God, revealed through divine intervention—viewpoints that firmly grounded Kierkegaard's conception of human liberation in a dependence on God.

In contrast to Christianity, the Pāli texts emphasise the need for its teachings to be understood as rationally constructed, as opposed to divinely revealed, or natural as opposed to supra-natural. Scholar of Buddhism, Kōgen Mizuno (1969) explores this issue in the context of early Buddhist philosophy, and in his arguments that seek to unearth the roots of the doctrines of the Four Noble Truths or the Three Marks of Existence in self-evident laws of the natural world, rather than metaphysical assertions and revelation.<sup>616</sup> A common consequence of perceiving the origins of Buddhism in this way, is for practitioners and scholars of Buddhism to ignore any need for discussion of the role of blind faith—for this is not a requirement of Buddhist teachings. Indeed, unlike other religious traditions, the central teachings of this practical approach to enlightenment has led comparative theologians, such as Morris Augustine (2007), to force unhelpful contrasts between Buddhism and Kierkegaardian philosophy, for Buddhism has a practical requirement, where the onus is on the individual—and not the divine Being—to guide oneself on the path to liberation, and to witness the advantages of doing so for themselves.<sup>617</sup> Thus, presenting Buddhism as philosophical system rooted in logic, and Kierkegaardian ideas within a system

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<sup>616</sup>Kōgen Mizuno, *Primitive Buddhism*, Kōshō Yamamoto (trans) (Tokyo: The Karin Bunko, 1969), p.166.

<sup>617</sup> Morris J. Augustine, 'The Sociology of Knowledge and Buddhist-Christian Forms of Faith, Practice, and Knowledge', in *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformations*, Paul O. Ingram & Frederick J. Streng (eds) (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007), p.46.

that approaches 'truth' through faith.<sup>618</sup><sup>619</sup> In other words, Buddhism is presented as extolling, through the Four Noble Truths and other connected philosophies, *objective* truth—a truth that can be ascertained through a person's rational response to the world. While, Kierkegaard is presented in direct opposition to this, as a philosopher who extols, in his approach to the liberation from suffering, a *subjective* truth—a truth that is ascertained through one's *absurd* personal relationship with God. In this context, Buddhists find liberation through their own experience of the world, while, according to Kierkegaard, liberation is achieved—and the nature and purpose of suffering is able to be understood—through one's personal sacrifice to God, of giving oneself up to him. The distinction between the two is made all the more prevalent when one considers that by emphasising the divinity of Christ, Kierkegaard wishes to suggest that Jesus' ability both to understand the nature of suffering and to teach the path of liberation, is rooted in his divine status. In other words, by equating Jesus with God, Kierkegaard advocates Christ's omniscience. This is in sharp contrast to the Pāli teachings concerning the nature of the Buddha. For the Pāli Canon continually emphasises the human nature of the Buddha, and seeks to highlight the Buddha's sentient nature, as a person subject to impermanence and suffering like any other person. From this it can be inferred that the Buddha's teachings are rooted in his immediate sentient experience of the world, while Jesus' teaching, by contrast, is inextricably linked to his divine status. As will become clear in the final section of this chapter (see pages 290-291) I disagree with the arguments presented by Augustine and also Sandra A. Wawrytko (2013),

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<sup>618</sup>Ibid.

<sup>619</sup> This area of the comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism will be explored in greater detail later within this chapter, however, it is worth noting that the issue of faith can be seen as an area of conflict. For, Kierkegaard is often discussed as affirming the importance of abandoning reason in favour of 'blind faith', something which can be seen as conflicting with the rational language often used in comparative religious literature when approaching Buddhism.

both of whom maintain that Kierkegaard's philosophy is in conflict to Buddhism, owing to Kierkegaard's work placing faith above reason. As I shall address shortly, the Pāli tradition *does* recognise the role of faith in the journey towards enlightenment, holding that one must possess confidence in the Buddha's teachings to be willing to apply them to one's life. That is to say, when a person first approaches Buddhism they have no guarantees that the *dhamma* will liberate them from suffering; thus, their decision to seek emancipation through the Buddhist tradition is a matter of faith in the truth of the Buddha's proclamations. This is similar to Kierkegaard's position in so far as he asserts that faith in Christ's guidance will move one closer to God. Subsequently, it would be wrong to infer that there is no role for faith in Buddhism, or to mark this as a point of conflict between Buddhist and Kierkegaardian thought.

Within the Pāli literature, Buddhahood is recognised as a result of a person achieving complete enlightenment, where he or she<sup>620</sup> has become awakened in their efforts to engage with the true nature of reality. Thus, the Buddha is acknowledged as the one who has realised the *dhamma* without the aid of a teacher; he or she subsequently realises the temporal character of the material world, and in so doing, discovers the means to liberation. The Buddha is understood to have purified his mind of the three root poisons (*akusala-mūla*), of delusion (*moha*), attachment (*rāga*) and hatred (*dosa*). As discussed earlier in this chapter, it is these three positions that are regarded as the foundation of *taṇhā*, meaning

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<sup>620</sup> The gender of any future or potential Buddha, is an area of great debate, for historically the different Theravāda schools, based on the teachings of the Pāli Canon have maintained that all previous Buddha's, as is the case with Siddhārtha Gautama, have been male. Equally, Gautama's successor, the next or future Buddha, Metteyya is too believed to be male. This, along with claims in the Pāli Canon that the Buddha must have a penis with a sheath, have led many to claim that only men are able to obtain Buddhahood. However, over the last three decades there has been a growing trend amongst some scholars of Buddhism and feminists to question this notion, highlighting that gender remains part of one's conditioned existence and therefore part of the illusion which one strives to overcome. For more on this see Dresser (1996).

that they bind one to *saṃsāra*. Through eradicating the *akusala-mūla*, the Buddha is believed to have overcome all unwholesome mental states (*akusala*), meaning that he is completely pure of action. This is clear in the *Khandhasaṃyutta* (SN 22:58, 65-66) where the Buddha professes:

Monks, through disenchantment with form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness, through their fading away and cessation, the Tathagata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One is liberated by clinging; he is called a Perfectly Enlightened One.<sup>621</sup>

This passage illustrates that Buddhahood is achieved when one overcomes the state of ignorance, caused by a person's attachment to temporal phenomena. The Buddha is one who has discovered the path to the cessation of suffering through eradicating earthly desires, and in this respect, it is evident that the Buddha differs significantly from Kierkegaard's Christ, as the Buddha is recognised as a being, born as part of the natural world, and not the creator of it. This recognition is reinforced throughout the Pāli Canon, for instance later in the *Khandhasaṃyutta* (SN 22:58, 65-66) it states:

The Tathagata, monks, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One, is the originator of the path unarisen before, the producer of the path unproduced before, the declarer of the path, undeclared before.<sup>622</sup>

The significance of this teaching rests on the fact that the Buddha is aware of, and can empathise wholly with, the plight of humanity. This notion is explored in detail by scholars of Buddhism, Martine and Stephen Batchelor, who argue that the Buddha was aware of the

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<sup>621</sup> As found in: Bhikkhu Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon*, Edited and Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2005), pp.413-414.

<sup>622</sup> As found in: Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon*, pp.413-414.



limitations of conditioned existence through his own human experiences.<sup>623</sup> That is to say, throughout his early life, the Buddha is recorded as having a broad range of attachments, from craving the luxuries associated with his early life, to his quest for non-being as an aesthetic practitioner. Indeed, by examining the life of the Buddha, Buddhist practitioners can be made aware of their own capabilities and limitations, for, as with them, the Buddha was himself a product of the five aggregates, and, as such, was vulnerable to the same deluded sense of self, and craving the same temporal pleasures. The Buddha, however, was able to overcome his conditioned existence through the realisation of the *dhamma*. But even in his post-enlightened state, the Pāli Canon continues to document multiple experiences that highlight the Buddha's *human* state and *human* experiences. For instance, the *Sekha Sutta* (MN 53:3-6), alludes to the Buddha's back pains and stomach problems—a common complaint that any given human has at one time or another suffered<sup>624</sup>—and the *Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta* (DN 4:25) which records the rudimentary tasks the Buddha carried out, such as sleeping, eating and washing.<sup>625</sup> By recording the human characteristics and experiences of the Buddha, the Pāli scriptures present him in ways that encourage his followers to relate to him, and to empathise with his sufferings, and recognising that he, too, experienced and suffered the same conditions and requirements as themselves. Both Martine and Stephen Batchelor recognise that the depiction of the human achievements of the Buddha help ordinary people to identify their own potentials and limitations and promote the idea that any and every person is capable of becoming an enlightened being;

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<sup>623</sup> Martine and Stephen Batchelor are Buddhist practitioners and authors. Both have previously trained as monastics, living for ten years in Buddhist centres across Asia, before choosing to leave the monastic saṅgha and develop/practice a lay or secular approach to Buddhism. Despite both Martine and Stephen originally practicing forms of Buddhism associated with the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna schools, their secular approach to Buddhism is founded on the teachings of the Pāli Canon and commentaries of early Buddhism.

<sup>624</sup> *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, p.461.

<sup>625</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, p.132.

or, if they prefer, simply to employ the Buddha's teachings as a guide on their *path* to enlightenment, rather than seeking to achieve the full experience of *dhamma*. Whilst the work of Martine and Stephen Batchelor emphasises the differences between the Buddha and Kierkegaard's notion of Christ, it is worth noting that their focus on the Buddha as one who has suffered in the same manner as other humans, could in fact open a possible point of comparison between these conceptions of Christ and the Buddha. Indeed, I return to this potential affinity later in this chapter. However, it is useful to note here that despite the prominence given to Jesus' divine status within texts such as *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler* [Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments] (1846), Kierkegaard accepts the numerous Biblical accounts which portray Christ as a suffering being. In fact, the passion narratives form a significant aspect of *Evangeliet om Lidelser* [The Gospel Sufferings] where Kierkegaard advocates to the reader that God has suffered as a man. Therefore—as I intend to argue—both Kierkegaard's theology and Pāli texts assert that their founder figure has endured the sufferings of humanity, and these experiences have informed their respective teachings.

In spite of the clear emphasis within the Pāli literature, explored thus far, concerning the humanity of the Buddha, there are, however, numerous other passages that discuss the supra-human aspects of the Buddha following his enlightenment. For instance, in the post-canonical *Nidānakathā*—a revered account of the Buddha's life within the Buddhist tradition—there are several instances where the Buddha is reported to have possessed superhuman abilities and various miraculous occurrences that occur during the Buddha's birth, such as the new-born infant taking seven steps and announcing himself chief of the

world.<sup>626</sup> Akin to this, there are other infancy narratives that record how the Buddha possessed a golden complexion, and how the Vedic gods threw petals before him.<sup>627</sup> Furthermore, according to the work of the scholar of Theravāda Buddhism, V.V.S Saibaba (2005), later Pāli literature—such as the *Cullaniddesa*, *Sutta-nipāta*, *Jātaka*, *Vimānavatthu* and the *Milindapañha*—use terms such as *devā-atideva*, meaning ‘pre-eminent God’ or ‘God above Gods’. Similarly, in the *Theragāthā* and commentaries concerning the *Petavatthu* and *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, the Buddha is referred to as the *deva-deva*, meaning, ‘the God of the gods’.<sup>628</sup> V.V.S Saibaba also illustrates, possible issues regarding the *human* status of the Buddha, within the actual teachings of the Pāli Canon. For instance, in the *Khandhasamyutta* (SN 22:87), the Buddha is recorded as saying “One who sees the Dhamma sees me”;<sup>629</sup> and, likewise, if one turns to other texts within the Pāli Canon, such as the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*, one finds such terms such as *dharmassāmī* to describe the Buddha, meaning ‘Lord of Dhamma’, and *amatassa dātā*, meaning ‘Bestower of Immortality’.

At first glance, these lofty descriptions and characterisations of the Buddha are analogous to the Christian teachings concerning the nature of Christ. With analogies being made within the numerous publications that have attempted to draw comparisons between the lives of Christ and the Buddha as recorded in the New Testament and the Pāli Canon respectively.<sup>630</sup> For example, within his essays concerning “religious constants”, historian George R. H.

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<sup>626</sup> *Buddhist Birth-Stories (Jātaka Tales) The Commentarial Introduction Entitled Nidana-Katha the Story of the Lineage Translated from Prof. V. Fausboll's Edition of the Pāli Text by T. W. Rhys Davids New and Revised Edition by Mrs Rhys Davids*, (London: G. Routledge, 1878), p.155.

<sup>627</sup> It should be noted here that the examples stated are all collected from infancy narratives, thus are examples of miraculous events or supernatural qualities which the Buddha is said to have had in his pre-enlightened state. This is significant as such events or qualities cannot be discussed as a product of the Buddha's awakening, which is often the case with other abilities such as him being able to recall all of his past lives etc.

<sup>628</sup> V.V.S Saibaba, *Faith and Devotion in Theravāda Buddhism*, (New Delhi: D K Printworld Ltd, 2005), pp.117-118.

<sup>629</sup> *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.939.

<sup>630</sup> These scholars include: Morgan (2013), Wright (1987), Minick (2006) and Elinor (2000).

Wright (1987), suggests that the birth narratives of Jesus and the Buddha involve miraculous events, and they do so, he claims, in an attempt to emphasise the spiritual purity of both men, placing them above the status of the rest of humanity.<sup>631</sup> Similarly, scholar of comparative religion Peggy Morgan, finds parallels between *Khandhasaṃyutta* (SN 22:87) and John 14:9 where it is said that “he who has seen me has seen the Father”.<sup>632</sup> This teaching is therefore seen to suggest that the Buddha is a physical expression of a higher truth or being, and that he, like Christ, can be construed as an incarnation of a higher power. This further implies that the Buddha possesses a permanence and preeminent nature, as he is the manifestation of something eternal and beyond the temporal world. This interpretation of the Buddha has clear parallels with Kierkegaard’s Christology, as it puts forward an eternal being who takes on human form for the purpose of divine revelation. However, as it made clear by Christian theologian Johannes Nissen (2013), to draw a comparison between *Khandhasaṃyutta* (SN 22:87) and John 14:9 is to distort the fundamental tenets of Theravāda Buddhism.<sup>633</sup> For Nissen asserts that John 14:9 is an expression of Christ’s role as the saviour and redeemer, as it articulates that Christ has “become flesh” so that humanity can be united with the Lord, thereby providing humanity with a guide to eternal life through Christ’s sacrifice. Conversely, in *Khandhasaṃyutta* (SN 22:87) the Buddha is not put forward as an infinite being comparable to the Christian ideal of God. Rather, the Buddha here likens himself to the concept of *dhamma*, which, as I have noted, is a complex term that is often used to denote the teachings and doctrines imparted

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<sup>631</sup> George R. H. Wright, *As on the First Day: Essays in Religious Constants* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), p.125.

<sup>632</sup> Peggy Morgan, ‘Buddhist Perspectives on Jesus’, in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus*, Delbert Burkett (ed) (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p.275.

<sup>633</sup> It should be noted here that whilst comparisons between *Khandhasaṃyutta* (SN 22:87) and John 14:9 are seen as incompatible with the Theravāda tradition, there are numerous publications that suggest similarities between the quote and the Mahāyāna model of the Buddha, owing to the doctrine of the *Trikāya* (three bodies of the Buddha). For more information on this see Kärkkäinen (2013) or Netland (2015).

by the Buddha. In this way, *Khandhasaṃyutta* (SN 22:87) is better interpreted as expressing the notion that an understanding of the *dhmma* is an understanding also of the essence of Buddhahood. In other words, through enlightenment, the Buddha is able to liberate himself from the bonds of conditioned existence, and in so doing, he is able to reveal to his followers the true nature of existence. In this way, the Buddha's life should be understood as an example of how the *dhmma* can be applied throughout a person's own life; and, thus, as Nissen claims, the Buddha that is presented in *Khandhasaṃyutta* (SN 22:87) is less a *sacred* being, as he is an *enlightened teacher*, who, through his own endeavours, was able to discover for himself the true nature of existence.<sup>634</sup>

Scholar of Buddhism, Jason Neelis (2010) is also keen to criticise scholarly attempts to equate the nature of the Buddha with that of Jesus, by arguing that the various accounts of the Buddha's life recorded in the Pāli Canon and other early Buddhist literature should be recognised simply as examples of hagiography. He argues, therefore, that many of the supernatural qualities ascribed to the Buddha should be understood as symbolic narratives<sup>635</sup> that seek to express the Buddha's status and enlightened qualities through a "narrative flourishing".<sup>636</sup> Paul Williams also contends that the accounts of the Buddha's life in the Pāli Canon are not historical records, and that they should be approached, rather, as ideological accounts that seek to reflect the religious interests of the community at the time, and the authors who compiled the hagiography.<sup>637</sup> This assertion continues within the work of V. V. S. Saibaba, who maintains that the exalted status of the Buddha in Pāli

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<sup>634</sup> Johannes Nissen, *The Gospel of John and the Religious Quest: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), p.141.

<sup>635</sup> Jason Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange Within and Beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p.67.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

<sup>637</sup> Williams, with Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction*, pp.24-25.

literature is testament to the needs of his early followers, who required these mythological traits in order to gain prominence above other religious movements of the time.<sup>638</sup> As Williams goes on to attest, by approaching the life of the Buddha in this way, his followers were in a position to express and to communicate to others the significance of *dharmā* to the Buddha, and by symbolic extension, also to themselves.<sup>639</sup> According Saibaba and Williams therefore, it would seem that the miraculous events and lofty titles associated with the Buddha should be approached symbolically, for they were employed to elevate the status and utility of the *dharmā*, as opposed to emphasising the divine nature of the Buddha. However, this notion is disputed by scholar of Buddhism, Mahinda Deegalle (2000), who argues that contemporary scholars of Theravāda Buddhism, such as Saibaba and Williams, are often all too quick in rejecting theological speculation concerning the Buddha. Deegalle cites the work of medieval Buddhist practitioner Vidyā Cakravartī as one who goes against the grain of this modern approach.<sup>640</sup> For instance, in a passage which discusses the conversation of Aṅgulimāla the thief, Cakravartī himself writes:

Lord, have you seen sins [*paṇa*] which your servant [*gatta*] has committed? Have you come so far alone out of compassion [*karuṇā*] for your servant? With all my life, I take your refuge. My eyes are cooled. My heart is calm. My sins are extinct.<sup>641</sup>

While passages such as this insinuate that salvation or redemption is achieved through the Buddha, it is important to remember that such beliefs concerning the nature of the Buddha do not chime with the traditional interpretations of the Pāli texts. As such—and as Deegalle

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<sup>638</sup> V.V.S Saibaba, *Faith and Devotion in Theravāda Buddhism*, p.117.

<sup>639</sup> Williams, with Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction*, pp.24-25.

<sup>640</sup> Mahinda Deegalle, 'From Buddhology to Buddhist Theology: An Orientation to Sinhala Buddhism', in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, Roger R. Jackson & John J. Makransky (eds) (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp.331-332.

<sup>641</sup> *Ibid*, p.338.

himself suggests—works such as Cakravarti's *Butsaraṇa* are often overlooked by contemporary practitioners or brandished as being poetic or whimsical.

By the same token, it is clear that the Theravāda schools have a firm tradition of characterising the Buddha in anthropological terms, based on their readings of the Pāli texts. For whilst the Buddha is recognised as having overcome his sense of ego through recognition of his conditioned state, he is still regarded as a sentient being, subject to the *tilakkhaṇa*. This is summarised in the words of the scholar of Theravāda Buddhism, Shravasti Dhammika (2005):

In the centuries after his final Nibbāna, it sometimes got to the stage that the legends and myths obscured the very real human being behind them and the Buddha came to be looked upon as a god. Actually, the Buddha was a human being, not a 'mere human being' as is sometimes said but a special class of human called a 'complete person' [mahāparisa]. Such complete persons are born no different from others and indeed they physically remain quite ordinary.<sup>642</sup>

It is clear from this discussion that Kierkegaard's Christology is in sharp contrast to the Buddhology of the Pāli texts, as Kierkegaard promotes a theological understanding of Christ, while the Theravāda schools, based on their interpretations of the Pāli texts advocate an anthropological understanding of Buddha. This has wider implications for my consideration for the comparative analysis between Kierkegaard's approach to suffering and the approach promoted by the Buddha's teachings recorded in the Pāli literature. For unlike the Buddhist

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<sup>642</sup> Shravasti Dhammika, *The Buddha and His Disciples* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2005), p.16.

tradition, Kierkegaard places significant emphasis on the role of the divine in enabling one to overcome the toils of the temporal world. Kierkegaard maintains that liberation is only achieved through personal relationship with God, through the divine Christ. According to Kierkegaard, this places the existential question of “how do we respond to [Christ]”<sup>643</sup> at the very heart of Christian life, for a person requires faith in the divinity of Christ in order to free themselves from the plight of temporal existence. This position differs markedly from Buddhism, with its human emphasis on the role of the Buddha. The Pāli texts suggest that liberation is not rooted in how a practitioner chooses to respond to the Buddha—the Buddha’s significance is not linked to the practitioners relationship to him (indeed, Gombrich asserts that the Theravādin tradition maintains that the Buddha no longer has an active role to play in the temporal world).<sup>644</sup><sup>645</sup> While the teachings of the Pāli texts concerning emancipation relies exclusively on the endeavours of the individual, Kierkegaard’s requires divine intervention. My analysis here, coupled with my earlier critique within Chapter Four (see pages 240-249), illustrates that, while these two systems hold similar beliefs concerning the temporal nature of the cosmos, their conceptions of emancipation from the material world are very different. Both recognise the temporal world as the cause of human dissatisfaction, and both maintain that one must detach oneself from material pleasures to find lasting satisfaction. However, Buddhism promotes a system where one finds lasting satisfaction through the ongoing development of mental discipline in order to overcome *taṇhā*, and thus escape the bonds of *saṃsāra*, whilst for Kierkegaard

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<sup>643</sup> Rae, *Kierkegaard and Theology*, p.120.

<sup>644</sup> Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History*, p.53.

<sup>645</sup> Unlike Kierkegaard’s Christ whom may still communicate with followers through prayer.



complete liberation is found only through one's ability to give oneself up in order to relate to the infinite.

It is clear from my conclusions thus far, that Kierkegaard's emphasis on Christ's divinity, expose significant tensions between his philosophy and that of Theravāda schools of Buddhism (due to their emphasis on the teaching of the Pāli Canon). This is owing to the fact that his theological understanding of Christ raises questions as to Christ's ability to emphasise with the plight of humanity. For how can a being who possesses all metaphysical perfections truly comprehend the feelings of dissatisfaction that humanity experiences when their desires go unmet. Therefore, in texts such as *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler*, Kierkegaard writing under the pseudonym Climactus, can be seen as creating a void between God and humanity, presenting Christ as if his divine status completely separates him from humanity. As shall become apparent, this presentation of Christ, not only conflicts with the anthropomorphic presentation of the Buddha in the Pāli texts but is also distinct to some of Kierkegaard's own signed works. For instance, in *Evangeliet om Lidelser* and *The Practice of Christianity*, Kierkegaard presents Christ in stark contrast with the ideas found in some of his more philosophical pseudonymous works. The Christ presented in the theological *Evangeliet om Lidelser* is one who possesses human failures, who has chosen to relinquish his divinity in order that he is able to suffer with humanity and in turn recognise their plight. The Christ found in these theologically charged texts is approached primarily as a human being, who has come to recognise the truth of reality from his own experiences, only after the events of the passion, where Christ is liberated from suffering does Kierkegaard begin to recognise him as being completely distinct from humanity. Subsequently, I shall now examine this alternative version of Christ presented within Kierkegaard's writings, in order to reveal a point of

reconcile between the anthropomorphic presentation of the Buddha in the Pāli texts and Kierkegaard's Christ.

### The Humanity of Christ and the Buddha

While, I hope I have shown, it is apparent that Kierkegaard's theological presentation of Christ sharply contrasts with the anthropological understanding of Siddhārtha Gautama found within Theravāda Buddhism and the Pāli Canon, a close examination of *Evangeliet om Lidelser* reveals a possible point of mediation between the two. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Kierkegaard approached Christ as the absolute paradox, stating that "god (the unknown) is both absolutely different from him and yet not absolutely other than man".<sup>646</sup> This quote reveals the complexity of Kierkegaard's theology, for he proposes that Christ is both eternal and transient, both completely distinct from humanity and yet identical to it. Philosopher Robert Larsen (1962), explains that this paradoxical aspect of Kierkegaard's argument has frequently deterred scholars from approaching Kierkegaard's Christology. Whilst orthodox Christian institutions tend to settle this paradox by alluding to its *divine mystery*, Kierkegaard places it at the centre of his Christian writings, from which all else follows.<sup>647</sup> Kierkegaard's interest in the paradox is embedded in his concept of faith, as he believed that true faith rested in a person's ability to embrace the absurdity of paradox. To hold Jesus as both God and man is irrational and disregards the need for objective proof; instead it compels one to accept the supra-rational nature of the divine and to give oneself to it completely—including one's rational state of mind. Kierkegaard argued that rational

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<sup>646</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p.194.

<sup>647</sup> Robert E. Larsen, 'Kierkegaard's Absolute Paradox', in *The Journal of Religion* vol.42, no. 1 (1962), p.37.

speculation about God's nature was a futile endeavour, and he maintained that rationality was dependant on an observational mode of thought, which at best could draw limited conclusions about human nature rooted in scientific principles – it certainly cannot explain the infinite nature of the divine. According to Kierkegaard, this can only be comprehended through one's own subjective experience of God. He writes:

But the ultimate potentiation of every passion is always to will its own downfall, and so it is also the ultimate passion of the understanding [Forstand] to will the collision; although in one way or another the collision must become its downfall. This, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think.<sup>648</sup>

It is this acceptance that forms the basis of Kierkegaard's famous "leap to faith"<sup>649</sup>—a situation where one chooses to trust in subjective truths concerning both divinity and the nature of life. Faith, for Kierkegaard, is rooted in one's personal choice to surrender to the paradoxical and absurd, and to embrace what cannot be explained in logical terms. In this way, Kierkegaardian scholar Clare Carlisle (2010) have maintained that Kierkegaard requires the individual to recognise the limitations of their finite status, and to recognise that there is a metaphysical other that is greater than themselves, and to give themselves freely to such a being in an attempt to overcome their temporal status and be welcomed into eternity.<sup>650</sup> The "leap to faith" is thus characterised by a discontinuation with all that came before. For in the leap, a person is transformed from their former state of ignorance to a new

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<sup>648</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p.37.

<sup>649</sup> Fredrik Fällman, *Salvation and Modernity: Intellectuals and Faith in Contemporary China* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2008), p.59.

<sup>650</sup> Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's 'Fear and Trembling': A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2010), p.19.

consciousness that enables them to recognise their own infinite attributes and to form a meaningful relationship with God.

On a surface level, Kierkegaard's concept of the paradoxical God may appear to conflict with some of the Pāli Suttas that have been explored previously in this chapter, owing to its emphasis on faith and its divine foundations, but it does present two possible areas of comparison. Firstly, Kierkegaard's paradox places emphasis on the humanity of Christ, recognising him as both completely human (as well as divine). Whilst this still means that ontological Christ and the Buddha are perceived in radically different terms by their respective followers, it does imply that, like Buddha, Jesus had experienced human suffering and thus can empathise with the plight of humanity. Secondly, Kierkegaard maintains throughout both *Evangeliet om Lidelser* and *Indøvelse i Christendom* [*Practical Christianity*] (1850) that in order to make a "leap to faith" one must imitate the life of Christ, by sacrificing the pleasures of the material world as Christ did, before the glory of eternity can be revealed to them. Accordingly, theologian David Gouwens (1996) suggests that the act of imitating Christ and thereby embracing Christ as the incarnation, is the foundation of Kierkegaard's concept of faith, for one cannot *prove* in logical terms that Christ is divine or that his example will lead one to eternity. Yet, Kierkegaard contends that one must take Christ as the prototype (*forbillede*) in the face of such uncertainty in order to escape the limitations of the finite life.<sup>651</sup> Moreover, Larsen (1962) too developed a similar argument that Kierkegaard adopts a particularly dynamic approach to theology, for Kierkegaard recognises God as a "logical contradiction",<sup>652</sup> and the individual must give himself or herself freely to this contradiction in order to find liberation. The paradox of Christ is central to the

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<sup>651</sup> David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.140.

<sup>652</sup> Larsen, 'Kierkegaard's Absolute Paradox', p.37.

overcoming of suffering, for it is through the guidance given by Christ that humanity can come to understand the nature of themselves and the temporal.

The humanity of Christ and his role as guide to liberation are central themes within Kierkegaard's understanding of liberation from suffering. Often, Kierkegaard likens Jesus to a parent or teacher who guides the child in light of their own life experiences. Kierkegaard emphasises the significance of Jesus' own suffering in similar way, as the means by which Jesus empathises with humanity, and is able to teach them about their own limitations and how they can be overcome. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I shall contend that Kierkegaard's focus on the more human aspects of Jesus, along with his insistence that Jesus should be seen as guide who demonstrates how one is to tread the path to liberation, offer meaningful points of correspondence between Kierkegaard's philosophy and Buddhism. As shall become clear, Kierkegaard's presentation of Christ within texts such as *Evangeliet om Lidelser* possesses a more empathetic quality, than in works such as *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler*, with Kierkegaard presenting a humble Christ, who suffers alongside humanity. A Christ who has chosen to suffer in order that he can identify with the human condition and moreover provide an example for people to follow, revealing through his actions how one can liberate themselves from human suffering. As I shall illustrate throughout the remainder of this chapter, this can be seen as analogous with the anthropomorphic presentation of the Buddha in the Pāli texts, with both holding that their respective founder has suffered the same difficulties as all of humanity and has the ultimately liberated themselves from conditioned existence. In this way, both systems advocate that through the actions of their founder the path to liberation from human suffering has been revealed and that through following their teachings one is able to liberate themselves from temporal suffering.

The significance of Christ's humanity within Kierkegaard's writings cannot be overstated; for it's through Christ's humanity that Kierkegaard attempts to establish a point of reference for the relationship between human individuals and God. Kierkegaard regards Jesus' humanity as an act in which the infinite empties itself (*kenosis*) to become comprehensible and relatable to other human beings. In relating to Christ's humanity, a person is able to conceive the will of God, and to infer from Christ's life how best to lead their own lives. The fact that Christ led a humble existence denied himself worldly pleasures and surrounded himself with social outcasts is therefore highly significant. For as Murry Rae rightly infers, Kierkegaard's interpretation of Christ is rooted in The Epistle of Paul and Timothy to the Philippians (Phil 2:7-8), where it is stated that Christ "emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave...he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death". Indeed, in *Evangeliet om Lidelser or Indøvelse i Christendom*, Kierkegaard refers to "the abased Jesus Christ, the lowly man, born of a despised virgin, his father a carpenter, in kinship with a few other folk of the lowest class".<sup>653</sup> By presenting Christ in this way, Kierkegaard follows in the path of Martin Luther, and John Calvin's *theologia crucis* [*theology of the cross*], in contradistinction to a *theologia gloriae* [*theology of glory*]. Kierkegaard subsequently presents a lowly or humble Christ—a Christ who has suffered greatly in order to bring about higher truth through divine revelation. Moreover, Kierkegaard focuses on Jesus as an outcast, who surrounded himself with sinners, making himself "one with the most wretched".<sup>654</sup> By presenting Christ in this manner, Kierkegaard seeks to draw attention to Christ's empathy for the plight of humanity at its lowliest and most depraved level.

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<sup>653</sup>Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, p34. See also: "Therefore the god must suffer all things, endure all things, be tired in all things, hunger in the desert, thirst in his agonies, be forsaken in death, absolutely the equal of the lowliest of human beings" Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (1985).

<sup>654</sup> Rae, *Kierkegaard and Theology*, p.58.

According to Kierkegaard the humble origins of Jesus are significant, as the true glory of Christ is seen through his acceptance of his hardships. This is alluded to when Kierkegaard contends that “a person walks the road of perfections in hardships”.<sup>655</sup> Here Kierkegaard clearly alludes to the sufferings experienced throughout the life of Christ, such as the temptations he faced in the wilderness, his betrayal at the hands of Judas and his ultimate sacrifice through the passion. For this means that as a human, even Christ had to suffer the hardships of the crucifixion so that he could reveal the joy of eternity to his followers. Kierkegaard likens this notion to the Book of Acts (14:12), where it is professed “through many hardships we must enter the Kingdom of God”, in order to emphasise the role of Christ as a guide through the sufferings of human life. Again, this aspect of Kierkegaard’s theology has a clear Biblical foundation, alluding to John (14:6) when Jesus identifies himself as “the way and the truth and the life”, signifying that it is through following his example that one can be liberated from suffering and experience the eternal. This has clear similarities with Buddhism, as Kierkegaard holds that, through Christ’s example, one is able to recognise the path to liberation. Therefore, like the Buddha, Christ is understood as demonstrating through his human status the extent of their own capability to achieve liberation.

Scholars such as David Law (2013) and Lee Barrett have placed Kierkegaard in the tradition of kenotic Christology, maintaining that it is clear from Kierkegaard’s portrayal of Christ, that he believed that the eternal logos undertook a process of self-limitation in order to be incarnated.<sup>656</sup> Thus, Law and Barrett maintain that Kierkegaard’s portrayal of Christ is stripped of his metaphysical perfections in order that he could relate to humanity. Both

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<sup>655</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.292.

<sup>656</sup> David R. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.1.

scholars, emphasise how Kierkegaard's works are reflective of the kenotic traditions of his day, namely the Giessen and the Tübingen schools, owing to the prominence given to more anthropomorphic elements of the New Testament, with Kierkegaard focusing on Christ as a social reformer or teacher, as opposed to the miraculous healer.<sup>657</sup> In this way, Law asserts that Kierkegaard "accentuated all the themes that foregrounded the story of the God who relinquished power and glory in order to love lowly human beings and enable them to grow in love".<sup>658</sup> From this stand point, Christ's experiences within the temporal world can be understood as exclusively human, to the extent that he did not possess divine insight, and, as such, was forced to confront the issue of suffering in the same manner as any other human being. This raises interesting questions concerning Jesus' role as guide on the path to the liberation from suffering, and whether or not it connotes a form of divine revelation. For if Law and Barrett are correct in asserting that Kierkegaard recognises Jesus as completely void of any divine attributes during his life, prior to the resurrection, it could be suggested that Christ's message is a product of his own personal experiences rather than his omniscience. In other words, by asserting that Kierkegaard holds a kenotic view of Christ, Law and Barrett both imply that Christ's impact (as Kierkegaard alludes to it in *Evangeliet om Lidelser*) cannot be a product of divine power, rather, it must stem from the finite capacities of Jesus. Thus, if Jesus, as Kierkegaard maintains, has liberated himself from temporal existence, he must have realised the path to liberation in his human capacity. This would suggest, therefore, that Christ is close in this respect to the Buddha, in so far as both

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<sup>657</sup> The validity of kenotic Christology is often questioned due to Christ's ability to perform miracles, however, such criticism is refuted by kenotic's who maintain that the miracles were not performed by Christ directly but were performed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Like this kenotics have attempted to maintain the validity of the gospel whilst emphasising that God voluntarily reduced himself to human status completely stripping himself of his divine attributes.

<sup>658</sup> Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*, p.188.



can be considered as achieving self-liberation due to their own endeavours, thereby illustrating the possibilities for liberation available to all humanity.

Whilst, one can criticise this idea relatively easily by citing the fact that Kierkegaard clearly references specific divine qualities of Christ when exploring his actions in the world. For instance, he notes that “Christ suffered, lest we are tempted by the ungodly thirst”,<sup>659</sup> and he explores the crucifixion as an act of omnibenevolence, by referring to the divine sacrifice as “God’s love in actuality”.<sup>660</sup> Such statements by Kierkegaard clearly suggest that he viewed Christ as one who acts from divine love; for instance, he continues to note: “Christ was without guilt, and for this very reason he had to suffer super-human suffering”.<sup>661</sup> Kierkegaard, likewise, seeks to emphasise the infinite nature of Christ’s compassion, by suggesting that he suffered as an innocent, freely accepting a punishment that he did not merit in order to bring humanity back into relationship with God. According to Kierkegaard, this fact alone confirms that Christ was not completely stripped of his divine attributes, for he refers to Christ’s compassion to highlight him as distinct to humanity. By stating that “only God suffers without guilt”,<sup>662</sup> Kierkegaard indicates that it was only through Christ’s divinity that he was able to suffer in innocence, and that this sacrifice is beyond the capabilities of a temporal being as it initiates from his metaphysical perfections.

Although such high-profile Kierkegaardian scholars, as Law and Barrett, discuss his work in terms of kenotic Christology, I wish to emphasise how this association with kenotic Christology signifies the value that Kierkegaard places on the human element of Jesus. The significance of Christ’s humanity is evident in when Kierkegaard states that “although he

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<sup>659</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.270.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

was the Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered” and also, from the fact that Jesus took the human form in order that he could experience the plight of man. As I noted earlier, Kierkegaard brings to light the isolation and anguish that Christ endured, and which led him to question the nature of his father for allowing him to be persecuted in such an agonising manner.<sup>663</sup> Kierkegaard therefore presents a Christ who had experienced both physical and mental anguish, which Kierkegaard held as characteristic of the human experience, and he does so in order to present to his readers an empathic God, who has *chosen* to suffer in order that he can both identify and inspire humanity. It is my contention that Kierkegaard wants his readers to recognise that in spite of his divine status, Christ was forced to suffer the afflictions of the guilty,<sup>664</sup> suffering *as a human* so that he could teach the world the path to liberation. Again, this expresses clear parallels with the Buddhology of the Pāli Canon, due to both the Buddha and Christ being upheld as having suffered the same ‘human’ turmoil as the rest of humanity—and not just physical pains, but temporal desires and self-concern. Both the teachings of the Buddha and Christ therefore stem from the human condition, and recognise the difficulties that humans face due to their attachment to temporal phenomena. Equally, both figures are upheld as having succeeded in eradicating their own earthly desires, overcoming their human condition, and finding liberation from the temporal world. As such, both act as an inspiration and guide to humanity, revealing the extent of human potential for self-liberation and providing guidance to those who wish to attain this goal.

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<sup>663</sup> Kierkegaard notes, for example: that “the Saviour of the world groans, My God, my God, why have you abandoned me” Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.270.

<sup>664</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.270.

Kierkegaard also spoke of Christ's conflict with the religious leaders of his time, and his isolation from the social structures of his day. As I argued in Chapter Two (see pages 75-81), it is vital for Kierkegaard to portray Christ as an isolated figure and separate from the wider community as it enables him to accentuate the significance of a life lived as an individual. Kierkegaard cites Biblical passages that detail Jesus' social isolation—such as his time in the desert, or occasions when he is mocked by crowds—to draw attention to the importance of self-sacrifice, and detachment from the temporal world. For this allows a person, Kierkegaard claims, to focus purely on God, and to appreciate the value of their individuality in relation to God for ultimate liberation. Throughout *Evangeliet om Lidelser*, Kierkegaard is keen to assert an individualised interpretation of liberation—one free from the shackles of social constraints. For examples, he cites Matthew 23:4 in order to allude to the Pharisees of the New Testament and to compare these to the leaders of any given society, by exclaiming that they inevitably constrain the individual and repress those they deem to be beneath them. Such leaders, Kierkegaard claims, place demands and responsibilities on to their social 'inferiors' in an attempt to prevent them from harnessing their individuality away from the will of their masters. To Kierkegaard, this social repression at the hands of the Pharisees of masters and leaders of society prevents a person from forming a meaningful relationship with God, and thereby prevents them from liberating themselves from the temporal world, for it ensures people remain focused on their worldly responsibilities, keeping them distracted from spiritual aspects of life. By the same token, Kierkegaard upholds Christ as revealing the limitations of finite social institutions, for, through Christ's own unwillingness to conform to social conventions, Christ impresses upon his followers the need for them to establish their individuality.

From my discussion so far, it is clear that individualism plays a significant role within Kierkegaard's Christology and the Buddhology of the Pāli Canon. As I explained in Chapter Four (see pages 235-240), Buddhist texts place great emphasis on personal salvation, where each person is considered responsible for their own awakening. Scholar of Buddhism, Peter Jackson (2003) asserts that Theravāda Buddhism (due to its focus on the teachings of the Pāli Canon), remains in sharp contrast to the other Buddhist schools because it advocates a "personal spiritual practice",<sup>665</sup> by strengthening a person's mind, helping them to overcome the *kilesas* (mental states which confuse the mind and lead to harmful actions often associated with the three root poisons). In this respect, Theravāda practitioners are charged by the Pāli Canon with the practice of the threefold discipline, of: *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (meditative concentration) and *paññā* (knowledge or wisdom), in order to liberate themselves from the ignorance (*avijjā*) that characterises the unenlightened mind.<sup>666</sup> The practice of these three disciplines is widely recognised as an individual endeavour, where one practices the seven purifications<sup>667</sup>--as outlined by Buddhaghosa--in an attempt to strengthen the mind and encourage it to recognise the conditioned nature of reality.<sup>668</sup> This

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<sup>665</sup> Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhadāsa: Theravada Buddhism and Modernist Reform in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003), p.222.

<sup>666</sup> This threefold system represents the three distinct categories that each facet of the eightfold path is sorted into. With *Sīla* (ethics or discipline), consisting of right speech, right action and right livelihood, *Samādhi* (meditative concentration) consisting of right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration, and *Paññā* (understanding or wisdom), consisting of right view and right thought. In approaching the eightfold path via these three divisions, it is believed that initially one focuses on *Sīla* in order to purify the mind through righteous actions, before strengthening the mind through the practice of *Samādhi*, so that finally one can develop the correct insight needed to understand the true nature of existence. For more on this see Thittila, (1997).

<sup>667</sup> It should be noted that the only mention of the Seven Purifications found within the Pāli Canon is in the *Dasuttara Sutta* (DN34:1.8), where the seven purifications are listed among nine items collectively called factors of endeavour tending to purification (*pārisuddhi-padhāniyanga*).

<sup>668</sup> The seven purifications as outlined by Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga*, provide a framework that aids a practitioner in the progression of the necessary meditative states which one must master before achieving enlightenment. Through attaining each state of purification, a practitioner is enabled to overcome their deluded sense of self and understanding of material phenomena as being permanent, enabling them to realise the true nature of reality. The seven perfections are listed as follows, Purification of Virtue, Purification of Mind, Purification of View, Purification by Overcoming Doubt, Purification by Knowledge and Vision of What is Path and Not-Path, Purification by Knowledge and Vision of the Way and Purification by Knowledge and Vision.

notion is supported by Wei-Yi Cheng (2007), whose research into the role of women within the monastic *saṅgha* in South East Asia discovered that Theravāda monastic communities across Sri Lanka and Taiwan advocate enlightenment as an almost exclusively *individual* pursuit. Wei-Yi Cheng draws attention within her interviews with practitioners to the fact that most of them emphasised the individualism of their practice, by recognising that ‘awakening’ is achievable only if a person adheres to the eightfold path.<sup>669</sup> This individualistic approach to liberation reflects Kierkegaard’s philosophical approach, in so far as a person is required to recognise that they, themselves, are solely responsible for their emancipation. Both approaches maintain that a person can free themselves from the binds of the temporal world only if they are able first to eradicate their attachments to materialist pursuits. As such, Kierkegaard’s portrayal of Christ and the presentation of the Buddha found in the Pāli texts, both stress the significance of individualism as a means to self-overcoming. This notion finds important parallels with my analysis in the Chapter Three (see pages 120-129) of the manner in which both the Buddha and Jesus were critical of the social and religious institutions of their day owing to the attention they give to collaborative liberation. It is becoming evident that the Pāli texts and Kierkegaard advance systems that recognise liberation as an achievement through individual merit—whereby a person is responsible for their liberation, and not granted it through the will of others or through divine grace acting alone.<sup>670</sup> Both philosophies advocate the founders of their system of thought—whether it

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Through this progressive series one’s mind becomes strengthened in order that is capable of comprehending the three marks of existence, *dukkha*, *anattā*, *anicca*. The final stage of purification, Purification by Knowledge and Vision, marks one’s attainment in the four stages of enlightenment, thus recognising that one has become an *arahat*. For more on this see Nanarama (1993).

<sup>669</sup> Wei-Yi Cheng, *Buddhist Nuns in Taiwan and Sri Lanka: A Critique of the Feminist Perspective* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p.97.

<sup>670</sup> It should be noted here, that whilst it is primarily only Kierkegaard’s first form of liberation, the liberation from human suffering, which can be achieved through individual merit, it is interesting to highlight that one must have attain the first level of liberation before one can be granted the second. This means that in spite of

be the Buddha or Christ—not only discovered the path to liberation but taught others how to obtain it for themselves. However, both Kierkegaard and the Pāli texts maintain that one must *choose* to follow these teachings *freely*, recognising that the path to liberation is demanding and that without the correct motivation one will be unable to attain it.<sup>671</sup> Both philosophical systems therefore place great significance on freedom of choice<sup>672</sup>, and, by choosing the path to enlightenment, both recognise that one chooses to approach life as an individual, abandoning material pleasures and avoiding social pressures in order to become self-reliant and disciplined. Kierkegaard, like Buddhism, upholds that liberation is attained by recognising the transformative quality of their founder's teachings then applying them to one's individual life.<sup>673</sup>

### Becoming an Individual

Whilst Law's kenotic approach to Kierkegaard is open to debate (a fact he himself admits throughout his work), his argument raises some intriguing questions, which help to develop a new understanding of the comparison between Kierkegaard's Christ and the Buddha. For Law suggests that Kierkegaard addresses Christological issues, not in order to establish a coherent argument about the nature of Christ, but, rather, to analyse the influence of

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the second form of liberation, liberation from all suffering, being attained by divine grace, one still has to have earned their first liberation before the second form of liberation become a possibility.

<sup>671</sup> K. Sri Dhammananda; Ven. Piyadassi Thera and Nandadeva Wijesekera, *Gems of Buddhist Wisdom* (Shah Alam: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1996), p.5.

<sup>672</sup> For instance, it is recorded in the Buddhist's Missionary societies 1996 publication, *Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*, that "one must have free choice whether to follow the dhamma based on his intellectual capacities". Dhammananda; Thera and Wijesekera, *Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*, p.5; alongside this Kierkegaard continually states that in order to approach Christ, one must be free of the influence of society, recognising themselves as an individual. Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.230.

<sup>673</sup> Indeed, as Kierkegaard states, "To follow [Christ], then means to walk by oneself and to walk alone along the path the teacher walked". Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.220.

Christ's identity on issues concerning human nature and discipleship. In this respect, Kierkegaard's Christology becomes a useful model for addressing existential human issues, as Christ's actions, for Kierkegaard, represents the ideal approach to the human condition. Law, therefore, claims that the central purpose of Kierkegaard's Christology is not about generating a theological debate about the nature of Christ, but encouraging his readers to recognise Christ as the ideal human, so that they will want to choose to emulate his approach to life. Law concludes that, through Kierkegaard's Christ, suffering possesses a transformative quality for humanity; that through Christ's suffering the true glory of Christ is exposed, highlighting not only the benevolence of God, but also the capacity of, and potentials for, humanity. As I have established, Kierkegaard's Christ suffered as a human, and this attests to the human capacity to suffer, and, moreover, to allow this suffering to move a person towards the infinite. As Kierkegaard states: "when the temporal suffering presses down the most, *procures a weight of glory such as that, then the eternal happiness certainly does have an overweight*".<sup>674</sup> Kierkegaard, thereby asserts, I wish to claim, that it is through suffering that humanity becomes inspired to strive to overcome their temporal condition, by recognising the limitations of temporal existence compared to the liberation of eternity.

In order to liberate oneself from temporal suffering, "one must", Kierkegaard claims, "walk by oneself and walk alone along the road that the teacher walked".<sup>675</sup> In other words—as stated by Murry Rae—the emphasis of the teachings of Christianity is placed on imitation (*efterfølgelsen*). Through applying the teachings of Christ to one's own life, the imitator (*efterfølger*) develops the ability to perceive the world as Christ had done, learning to

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<sup>674</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.312.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid, p.220.

“conform one’s mind to the mind of the teacher”.<sup>676</sup> By recognising that the temporal world provides only momentary spells of happiness, and that the impermanence that characterises the world will always lead to dissatisfaction, the imitator is exposed to the true nature of reality. A consequence of this for Kierkegaard, is the recognition of the value of denying oneself (as Christ had done); this, for him, becomes a virtue, and a crucial means to the liberation from the dissatisfaction that arises from valuing the temporal above the eternal. In this respect, Kierkegaard maintains that the *efterfølger* “renounces the world and all that is of the world renounces every connection that ordinarily tempts and captures”.<sup>677</sup> Suffering, for Kierkegaard, is thereby integral to life and a vital part of asserting one’s individuality;<sup>678</sup> it awakens a person to the dissatisfaction of the finite existence and motivates him or her to strive for something beyond the temporal world. To Kierkegaard, suffering leads to God.

By accentuating Christ’s ability to empathise with the human condition, Kierkegaard opens his theology to insightful comparisons with Buddhism. By stripping Christ of his metaphysical perfections, Kierkegaard presents Christ as having experienced the hardships and temptations of the human condition, and as a teacher who teaches from personal experience as opposed to divine revelation. Theologian, Paul Martens (2010) alleges that Kierkegaard is attempting to establish a more approachable Christ, a personable figure that humanity can relate to, by recognising a commonality between Christ and themselves.<sup>679</sup> Indeed, it is along this line of reasoning that Kierkegaard, I contend, advocates a Christ who

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<sup>676</sup> Ibid.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid, p.223.

<sup>678</sup> Victor A. Shepherd, *The Committed Self: An Introduction to Existentialism for Christians* (New York: PBS Books, 2015), p.151.

<sup>679</sup> Paul Martens, ‘The Women in Sin: Kierkegaard’s Late Female Prototype’, in *Kierkegaard and the Bible. Tomb II: The New Testament*, Lee C. Barrett & Jon Bartley Stewart (eds) (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), p.128.



is comparable to the Buddha, for, as I have argued, one of the defining characteristics of Buddhology of the Pāli Canon, is the Buddha's humanity—an essential aspect of his nature that confirms his ability to advocate the *dhamma*. Earlier I discussed how the Buddha had experienced, prior to his enlightenment, the same cravings for temporal phenomena as other humans do (see pages 263-265), and that his teachings are consequently delivered with an awareness of the human condition and how to overcome its sufferings. We are now in a position to see how this similarity with Kierkegaard's Christ, with its human aspects, means that both the Buddha and Christ serve as useful role models. Indeed, in respect to the Buddha, scholar Jack Kornfield (2007), suggests that the Buddha's experience of human sufferings enables Buddhist practitioners to recognise his philosophy of liberation as something that they themselves can achieve and aspire to. In other words, by recognising that the Buddha and his disciples (both past and present) attained enlightenment as finite *human* beings, practitioners can recognise their own potentials and appreciate the practical nature of Buddhism.<sup>680</sup> Kornfield asserts that, while other religions understand liberation as a product of ritual and sociological convention, Buddhism advocates "practical wisdom", which practitioners can see at work throughout the life of the Buddha and his enlightened followers.<sup>681</sup> In this respect, the teachings of the Pāli Canon, alongside Kierkegaard's philosophy, advocates that the path to liberation is exemplified through the lives of the respective role models of the Buddha and Christ.

In addition to this, as I also discussed earlier, Christ overcame what Kierkegaard termed human suffering, in spite of his humble *human* origins, thereby illustrating that liberation is

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<sup>680</sup> Jack Kornfield, *Modern Buddhist Masters: (Living Buddhist Masters)* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2007), p.7.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid.

open to all, regardless of one's status in society. This interpretation of Christ has clear parallels with Buddhism, given that, in Buddhism too, enlightenment is open to all people regardless of social position. Thus, as theologian Charles Bellinger (2008) makes clear in relation to Kierkegaardian philosophy, Kierkegaard requires the individual to surrender their previous identity and to abandon their social standing in their attempts to emulate Christ. Therefore, for Kierkegaard, the identity of the individual who seeks liberation is rooted in their Christian faith, and not in their social identity, making all equal in Christ. Similar themes can also be found within the Pāli Canon, where emphasis is given on the need on a person to abandon their standing within the *varṇa* system, before they are able to embark on the quest for personal awakening. This is made clear in the *Atthakanipāta* (AN 8:19.4), where the Buddha compares giving up one's former identity and sociological standing when joining the *saṅgha*, to the analogy of different rivers merging into the same ocean. He writes: "whatever great rivers there are — such as the Ganges, the Yamunā, the Aciravatī, the Sarabhū, the Mahī — on reaching the ocean, give up their former names and designations and are simply called the great ocean".<sup>682</sup> In this respect, both the Buddha and Kierkegaard's conception of Christ can be seen as encouraging equality amongst their followers, by challenging religious hierarchies, and by encouraging the social outcasts of their time to strive for their own personal awakenings—a goal that was denied them by the religious elite of their respective times. By encouraging this aspect, both philosophical systems advocate enlightenment as open to all who are willing to sacrifice their attachment to worldly pursuits.

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<sup>682</sup> *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, p.1142.

It is becoming clear that there exists a point of comparison between the presentation of the Buddha in the Pāli texts and Kierkegaard's understanding of the humanity of Christ. With both the Buddha and Jesus being recognised as self-liberated individuals, who, through their example, reveal to others the capabilities of humanity. This develops the idea I introduced earlier of Kierkegaard's desire to strip Christ of divine attributes (see pages 278-281), in order to ascribe to him the same limitations and attributes of all other human beings. Thus, when Kierkegaard explores Christ's overcoming of temptation and his ability to recognise the transitory nature of the temporal world, Kierkegaard suggests that Christ achieved these through his finite *human* capacity; and that this, in turn, signifies that all humans have the capacity to achieve similar feats. This has clear points of parallel with Buddhism due to the fact that both systems present their central figure as one who has overcome temporal suffering. These conclusions expose new comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism which has been overlooked in previous scholarly works—and I believe it has been overlooked because scholars have been too quick to reject any possible connections between Kierkegaard's more theological writings and Buddhism. However, it has become increasingly apparent to me that it is Kierkegaard's more theological works that reveal the more significant resemblances between his philosophy and the teachings of the Pāli texts.

I shall now turn my attention to a further area of the comparison (between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism). Again, this area of study has suffered due to poor scholarship, with scholar of Buddhism, Sandra A. Wawrytko (2013), presenting the philosophies of Buddhism and Kierkegaard too narrowly in her assessment, arguing that it is not possible to forge meaningful comparisons between them, due to Kierkegaard's emphasis on faith. She suggests that Kierkegaard's insistence that faith is necessary part of the path to liberation, places him in conflict with Buddhism, for she contends that Buddhism does not require the

“absurd leap of faith demanded by Kierkegaard’s philosophy”,<sup>683</sup> owing to Buddhist philosophy being rooted in reason and empirical evidence.<sup>684</sup> However, as shall become apparent throughout the rest of this chapter, I believe Wawrytko’s conclusion to be erroneous, failing to recognise the complex role that faith plays in both the Buddhism and Kierkegaardian philosophy.

### The Role of Faith

Whilst Winston King has focused on the rational or scientific aspects of Buddhism in his work—often referring to Buddhism in terms such as “religious atheism”<sup>685</sup> or “faithless”<sup>686</sup> religion—it is my contention that such claims are more often than not inappropriately emphasised, due to the significant emphasis placed on faith within the Pāli literature. In the final section of this chapter I will argue for this and explain my case. To help me, I will examine key Buddhist concepts, such as *saddhā*, in order to establish further connections between Kierkegaard’s Christology and the teachings of the Pāli texts. The notion of faith within Pāli scriptures is a complex and often misunderstood topic, with many introductory and comparative publications professing Buddhism to be a “faithless”<sup>687</sup> tradition<sup>688</sup>. Such volumes, often attempt to justify these claims by focusing on the experiential aspect of Buddhism, by maintaining that Buddhism does not ask its practitioners to blindly follow a doctrine rooted in the metaphysical assertion, but, instead, it adopts a more rationalised

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<sup>683</sup> Wawrytko, ‘The Buddhist Challenge to the Noumenal: Analyzing Epistemological Deconstruction’, p.233.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid.

<sup>685</sup> King, *Buddhism and Christianity*, p.37.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid.

<sup>687</sup> Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p.217.

<sup>688</sup> Other scholars who have suggested this include: Safran (2003), Valea (2015) and Wawrytko (2013).

approach, where one can recognise the truth of its claims through an examination of its causal impact on a person's life.<sup>689</sup> This is made clear, within the work of comparative theologian, Ernest Valea (2015), who infers that Buddhism utilises a rationalised approach to liberation that helps a person to awaken themselves to the conditioned nature of reality through its philosophical application. Valea thereby notes that central teachings, such as the Four Noble Truths, are self-evident truths that a person is able to recognise their existence through their experiences of the world. He continues to note that this suggests enlightenment is rooted in the individual's interpretations of the Buddha's teachings, as opposed to the grace of God. In this way, Valea presents Buddhism and Christianity (and therefore Kierkegaard) as antithetical philosophical systems, as completely divided, for Christianity teaches that salvation is achieved exclusively through belief in Christ's divinity, and personal faith is central to a person's redemption.<sup>690</sup>

Approaches such as Valea's are limited, for they equate faith with belief in a metaphysical other, and, as such, they fail to recognise the wider applicability and broader connotation of faith—failing to realise, for instance, that it is possible for people also to have faith in finite beings and concepts. This wider approach to the concept of faith reflected in the work of the comparative philosopher Devidas Tahiliani (2016), who maintains that *non-theological* systems, such as Buddhism, continue to recognise that faith *is* necessary for practitioners to achieve awakening. For in order to reach *nibbāna*, the Buddhist must first follow the teachings of the Buddha, which must be motivated by their faith in the Buddha's own acquisition of enlightenment, and faith, therefore, that he is able to guide them, and others,

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<sup>689</sup> Bhikkhu Chao Chu, 'Buddhism and Dialogue Among the World Religions: Meeting the Challenge of the Materialistic Skepticism', in *Ethics, Religion, and the Good Society: New Directions in a Pluralistic World*, Joseph Runzo (ed) (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1992), p.169.

<sup>690</sup> Ernest Valea, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue as Theological Exchange* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015), pp. 219-237

to do the same. According to Tahiliani, the difference between faith in Buddhism and Christianity, therefore, rests on the notion that Buddhism does not require “blind faith”.<sup>691</sup> This idea is too explored by scholar of Theravāda Buddhism, Jan Ergardt (1977), who asserts that faith holds a significant position in the Pāli Canon and is a concept that underpins numerous Suttas. Ergardt examines *Angulimāla Sutta* (MN 86) by way of example, and suggests that the conversion of Anlgulimāla, the robber who features within the passage, is itself an expression of his faith. When Anlgulimāla proclaims “This ‘I’ shall once get rid of evil thoughts hearing the dhamma in your voice”,<sup>692</sup> Ergardt suggests that Anlgulimāla is making a personal choice to dedicate himself to the teachings of the Buddha. Thus, Anlgulimāla entrusts his liberation from the temporal world to the Buddha and has faith in the fact that the Buddha will guide him to enlightenment. Obviously, Anlgulimāla like all who choose to embrace the teachings of the Buddha, has no reassurances that the Buddha will alleviate his sufferings, but, nonetheless, he places his trust in the Buddha, abandoning his previous life to take up monastic orders.

Ergardt concludes that faith holds an important place within the Pāli texts, being encapsulated in the Pāli term *saddhā*.<sup>693</sup> The meaning of the term *saddhā*, however, is not universally agreed upon with scholar of Buddhism Gunapala Piyasena Malalasekera (1984),—in contradistinction to Ergardt—thinking it inappropriate to define in terms of ‘faith’ due to the metaphysical associations and connotations that ‘faith’ is thought by Malalasekera to imply. Malalasekera highlights that the term ‘confidence’ is often used instead, and is thought by some translators to be more fitting a definition of *saddhā* in

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<sup>691</sup> Devidas (Dev) Tahiliani, *Live and Let Live Under One G-O-D* (Pittsburgh: Rosedog Books, 2016), p.313.

<sup>692</sup> Jan T. Ergardt, *Faith and Knowledge in Early Buddhism: An Analysis of the Contextual Structures of an Arahant-formula in the Majjhima-Nikāya* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), p.40.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid, p.142.

accordance with its use within Buddhist literature.<sup>694</sup> Scholar of Buddhism, Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw (2012) insists, however, that confidence is also inappropriate on the basis that it is too narrow a term, for, he says, “*saddhā* reaches from existential surrender to the tenets of a certain religion, which govern one’s conduct and thought”.<sup>695</sup> Hence, for Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw at least, *saddhā* signifies more than mere confidence; it is an expression of one’s willingness to sacrifice one’s previous approach to life, in order to follow the teachings that have yet to be proven – it is akin, one might say, to a Kierkegaardian leap to faith: a leap into uncertainty. In other words—and, as I shall discuss shortly—both Kierkegaard and Buddhism recognise that a person must be willing to accept uncertainties if they are to acquire liberation. In this respect, Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw underscores the point that faith is indeed a vital aspect of Buddhism. On the basis that *saddhā* is an imperative quality for those seeking enlightenment. He suggests this is evident when one considers that *saddhā* is included amongst the seven treasures (*dhana*),<sup>696</sup> and is thus one of the spiritual faculties (*indriyas*),<sup>697</sup> and one of the spiritual powers (*balas*).<sup>698</sup> In this reading, *saddhā* is a motivating factor for Buddhists who subscribe to the teachings of the Pāli Canon, as it indicates a *striving* for enlightenment, and is thus necessary for the attainment of *nibbāna*. This point is supported and confirmed in the *Cūḷahatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 27:1-7), where the Buddha advocates that the first step towards enlightenment is to have faith in him. But,

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<sup>694</sup> Gunapala Piyasena Malalasekera, *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, Volume 4, Issue 2* (Colombo: Government of Ceylon, 1984), p.224.

<sup>695</sup> Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw, *The Workings of Kamma* (Mawlamyine: Pa-Auk Meditation Centre, 2012), p.373.

<sup>696</sup> The seven treasures, as found in *Sattakanipāta* (AN 7:6) refer to seven qualities that are necessary for one to gain enlightenment. The Buddha refers to these qualities as the antihinderances, as they are seen to combat the five hindrances that pollute the mind. For more on this see Goldstein (2014).

<sup>697</sup> The five spiritual faculties are seen as the ‘governing principles’ which govern an enlightened being’s interactions with the world. They consist of faith, vigour, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

<sup>698</sup> The five powers, consist of the following qualities faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. Which when developed together aids one in overcoming the five hindrances.

importantly, by itself, faith is not enough to achieve enlightenment for one must also practice virtue, meditation and wisdom to overcome attachments.<sup>699</sup>

From this discussion, it is clear that faith encourages a person to initiate the practice of Buddhism, for it enables them to take refuge in the three gems, placing Buddhism at the centre of their approach to the material world. However, *saddhā* or 'faith' is, itself, not enough to liberate a person from *saṃsāra*, for whilst it can lead them to the practice of Buddhism, enlightenment is achieved through mastery of the threefold discipline of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* (knowledge or wisdom). Thus, *saddhā* can be regarded, I claim, as having faith in the fact that Buddhism can lead to awakening; it is therefore, important as the motivating factor to keep a person engaged in this pursuit.

I discussed earlier that comparative works concerning the theological outlooks of Christianity and Buddhism (such as the volume published by Valea [2015], Wawrytko [2013] and Safran [2003]) frequently emphasise the role of faith as a principal area of conflict between these two traditions, so that faith is deemed to be part and parcel of the Christian tradition, while absent and completely negated within Buddhist philosophy. However, as I have argued, this perception is misguided, for it completely ignores the central role of *saddhā* in motivating a person to become a *sotāpanna*. In this respect, I wish to claim that faith has a significant role to play in *both* traditions, and, as such, it offers fresh insights into the relationship between the two. Of particular interest in my research are the significant comparisons that are found between Kierkegaard's approach to faith and that of Buddhism. This opens up new comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, which have previously been overlooked.

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<sup>699</sup> *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp.269-270.



Faith plays a significant part in Kierkegaard's model of liberation, with the need to emulate Christ as the principal means of emancipation. Kierkegaard's approach to faith is often misrepresented by people with passing familiarity with his philosophy. As the existentialist philosopher Michael Watts (2003) rightly points out, "when Kierkegaard speaks of the fact that faith requires a 'leap' on the part of the individual, he is not talking about any type of 'blind leap' or 'leap into the dark' which some forms of existentialism talk about".<sup>700</sup> Rather, Kierkegaard suggests that faith is a *free choice* to trust in Christ, such that the 'leap to faith' is the result of a deep deliberation. Indeed, as Kierkegaard asserts: "Leap of faith – yes, but only after reflection".<sup>701</sup> Kierkegaard maintains that before a person can give themselves freely to God, they need to be fully aware of the sacrifice this requires, and, moreover, be willing to make it freely.

This deep reflection requires one to engage with the absurdity of life and the paradox of Jesus. The leap to faith, as Kierkegaardian scholar Clare Carlisle (2010) puts it requires a "faith" that "begins precisely where thinking leaves off".<sup>702</sup> Deep reflection is therefore very deep indeed! It requires sheer dedication on the part of the individual, and a thorough self-assessment of their life in and out of relationship with God, as a means to ensure they have the spiritual strength to walk the "narrow path", as Kierkegaard puts it. Kierkegaard does not condone an irrational leap into the unknown, but a reasoned sacrifice, for as is noted by Watts, faith for Kierkegaard, denotes a willingness to sacrifice one's old life in order to discover the absolute truth.<sup>703</sup> Faith for Kierkegaard therefore reflects the Buddhist *saddhā* in so far as both conceptions denote a willingness to reject material pleasures with no

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<sup>700</sup> Michael Watts, *Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), p.89.

<sup>701</sup> Hilary Putnam, 'The Depths and Shallows of Experience', in *Science, Religion, and the Human Experience*, James D. Proctor (ed) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.81.

<sup>702</sup> Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's 'Fear and Trembling': A Reader's Guide*, p.19.

<sup>703</sup> Watts, *Kierkegaard*, pp.89-90.

guarantee that such rejection will lead to a spiritual awakening. Accordingly, Watts refers to Kierkegaard's concept of faith as the will of self-realisation, for it is the motivating factor that ensures one remains true to the example of Christ; it ensures self-commitment to the path of liberation. In this manner, Kierkegaard refers to faith as "the highest passion in a human being",<sup>704</sup> for it is what enables a person to overcome their temporal nature, earning them the glory of eternity.

It is clear that faith has a significant role within Buddhism and Kierkegaard's model of liberation, with both systems granting it a vital role in inspiring practitioners both to begin and to remain on the path to enlightenment. Thus, Sandra A. Wawrytko has failed to grasp the complexity of Kierkegaard's concept of faith, by misconstruing it as an irrational act or blind leap. Rather, in keeping with the Pāli teaching of *saddhā*, it denotes a willingness on the part of the individual to dedicate themselves to the Christian path, despite the lack of guarantee that it will lead them to liberation. Kierkegaardian faith and Buddhist *saddhā* therefore represent a person's willingness to give themselves freely to their chosen system. Neither Christian faith, nor *saddhā* are irrational or blind, but denote that a choice has been made after deep deliberation. Faith, like *saddhā* should be held as one's source of motivation to continue on one's journey towards liberation.

### Summary

Overall, despite the significant differences that exist between Kierkegaard's Christology and the Buddhology of Pāli Canon, there are a number of intriguing parallels that offer fresh and

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<sup>704</sup> Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, p.151.

new insights into the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity. For, despite Christ's essential divinity, Kierkegaard argues that Christ should be understood as a being susceptible to the desires and pains of humanity. In this way, Kierkegaard attempts to present Christ as empathic to human needs. This has clear parallels to the presentation of the Buddha in the Pāli scriptures, as both the Buddha in this reading and Kierkegaard's Christ are portrayed as figures that reveal the human potential to overcome material desires. In addition, Kierkegaard's Christ is presented by him as discovering the path to liberation *through* his human experiences, by having first to endure his suffer before he could recognise how to overcome it. As such, Kierkegaard does not recognise Christ as a figurehead who teaches the faithful from a position of omniscience, but rather, from a position of humanity, as an individual person with individual experiences. Again, this reflects the nature of the Buddha, who is upheld to be the "self-enlightened one"—as one who discovers the *dhamma* through his own efforts to free himself from the bonds of *samsāra*. Both philosophical systems advocate the necessity of abandoning materialism and conformity to social hierarchies, in order to embrace an individualist approach to enlightenment, as exemplified by their respective figureheads, of the Buddha and Christ. In their respective approaches to liberation, both systems recognise the need for faith, for one must trust that the Buddha's teachings or those of Christ can lead a person to liberation before they embrace them.

## Conclusion

My research is original and develops important lines of thinking for Buddhist studies and Kierkegaardian philosophy in several ways. Most significant is my contribution is to the study of the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, and, what I consider to be, one of the most—if not most—thorough evaluations of their overlaps. First, I assessed and re-evaluated existing scholarship within this area of study and highlighted the significant failings that have marred previous comparisons. In the process, I resituated the comparative study of Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism from its current simplistic and erroneous assertions, by establishing a more detailed and accurate groundwork for the more significant parallels between Kierkegaard's concept of *angest* and the Buddhist idea of *dukkha*. Following this, I demonstrated the important comparisons between Kierkegaard's approach to 'suffering' and the Buddhist teaching of the *cattāri ariyasaccāni* (as found in the Pāli Canon)—a comparison that had hitherto been overlooked by scholars in the field. I have, subsequently, sought to ensure that each of my chapters has exposed a more rigorous understanding of the comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, by developing more precise points of comparison, to convey the intricate relationships that can be traced in the Kierkegaardian (in both its existential and theological forms) and Buddhism as presented in the Pāli texts.

I began my analysis by contrasting Kierkegaard's concepts of *angest* (or anxiety) and suffering to highlight how they convey different meanings within Kierkegaard's philosophy. It was vital to establish a clear distinction between these concepts, given that I had discovered that previous scholarship on the relationship between Kierkegaard and

Buddhism had conflated these two terms, and had thereby misunderstood experiences of suffering as *angest*. This led these scholars such as Elwood and Smith developing problematic understandings of the relationship between Kierkegaard and Buddhism. Unfortunately, this problem continues even within Kierkegaardian scholarship, with esteemed commentators, such as Clare Carlisle (2006),<sup>705</sup> Arne Grøn (2008),<sup>706</sup> and Azucena Palavicini Sánchez & William McDonald (2014)<sup>707</sup> all using suffering as a surrogate term for *angest* (or anxiety) in their analyses of Kierkegaard's work *Begrebet Angest* [*The Concept of Anxiety*].

The problematic tradition of equating *angest* with suffering has led scholars of both Kierkegaard and Buddhism to link *angest* with *dukkha*—a problem that has been exacerbated by both *angest* and *dukkha* being translated into English as 'suffering'. The consequence of this is that the aforementioned scholars have misinterpreted the relationship between the two, arriving at simplified and naïve explanations for them as expressions of psychological turmoil. By demonstrating that *angest* is *not* equivalent to suffering within Kierkegaard's philosophy, I have sought to expose the limitations of current scholarship in this field. I have argued that the concept of *angest* was not employed by Kierkegaard as a form of suffering, but as an ontological condition, originating in the human capacity for freedom.<sup>708</sup> *Angest* is therefore not necessarily an adverse or undesirable emotion, but an awakening of self-consciousness, which enables the individual to gain control of their life.<sup>709</sup> I sought to highlight the difference between *angest* and Kierkegaard's

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<sup>705</sup> Carlisle, *Kierkegaard: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p.101.

<sup>706</sup> Grøn, *The Concept of Anxiety in Søren Kierkegaard*, p.101.

<sup>707</sup> Azucena Palavicini Sánchez & William McDonald, 'Evil', in *Kierkegaard's Concepts Tome III: Envy to Incognito*, Steven N. Emmanuel, William McDonald & Jon Stewart (eds) (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p.30.

<sup>708</sup> Cihak, *Balthasar and Anxiety*, p.67-83.

<sup>709</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.55.

understanding of suffering in Chapter Two, by focusing on the nature of suffering in Kierkegaard, and explaining how Kierkegaard holds two distinct forms of suffering—namely human (or universal) suffering, and Christian suffering.<sup>710</sup> From my analysis it was clear that, whilst *angest* is an unavoidable consequence of human ontology, suffering is a product of one's engagement with the temporal world. This difference is significant, because it means that a person can liberate themselves from their *suffering* by mastering their mind, and thereby prevent themselves from becoming consumed by desires for impermanent phenomena. My analysis confirms that the previous works that link *angest* with *dukkha* had failed to recognise the complexity of Kierkegaard's existentialism. In this way, I have exposed the frailty of the persisting academic trend to unite Buddhism and Kierkegaard through the notion of suffering and have thereby dismantled the foundations upon which the previous comparisons between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism has stood for over four decades.

This is not to say that I completely reject comparisons between *angest* and *dukkha*, but, rather, that I think the existing parallels that have been made between the two are feeble and rooted in word-associations as opposed to any meaningful, philosophical points of comparison. Therefore, in Chapter Three, I consolidated my analysis of these two terms. This enabled me to arrive at more accurate points of comparison between *angest* and *dukkha*, and to establish a more stable ground upon which to rebuild a meaningful comparison between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism as expressed within the Pāli texts. Unlike the majority of scholarship, I do not define *dukkha* as a whole with 'suffering' and recognise that Buddhist philosophy recognises that *dukkha* has three distinct forms—

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<sup>710</sup> Olesen, 'The Role of Suffering in Kierkegaard's Gospel', p.180.

namely, *dukkha-dukkha*, *vipariṇāma-dukkha*, and *saṅkhārā-dukkha*. Previous efforts tend to identify *dukkha* exclusively with its first form: that of *dukkha-dukkha* (the experiences of *dukkha* which arise through unpleasant physical or psychological experiences. But by carefully examining all three forms of *dukkha*, I have been able to conclude, in contrast with previous efforts, that it is the *third form* of *dukkha*—*saṅkhārā-dukkha* (*dukkha* caused through formations)—that comprises the most significant of parallels with Kierkegaard’s concept of *angest*.

The third form of *dukkha* is often explored by scholars with reference to the Buddhist concept of *anattā* and the related idea of the five aggregates; Padmasiri De Silva, for instance, claims that *saṅkhārā-dukkha* is founded on a person’s inability to accept the conditioned nature of their existence.<sup>711</sup> In this respect, it is presumed that the interplay between the five aggregates (particularly that of *viññāṇa*) leads one to gain a sense of self, and an understanding of their existence in terms of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. Subsequently, De Silva asserts that *saṅkhārā-dukkha* can give rise to feelings of anxiety—and it is these feelings of anxiety that, I contend, draw parallels with Kierkegaard’s conception of *angest*, because this anxiety stems from one’s sense of self, and the concern for one’s future that this can give rise to; in other words, it is linked to one’s ontology.<sup>712</sup> In this way, both *angest* and *saṅkhārā-dukkha* seem to produce a form of egotism, causing a person to be concerned with the consequences of their actions, and how they hinder other aspects of their lives. I sought to explain how this argument helps us to make links with Kierkegaard’s notion of *angest*, by developing the argument with reference to the Buddhist idea of *uddhacca*-

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<sup>711</sup> De Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, p.49.

<sup>712</sup> *Ibid.*

*kukkucca*—an idea that is characterised by a restless mind consumed with self-concern.

Again, *uddhacca-kukkucca* is comparable to *saṅkhārā-dukkha* because it arises from a person's concern for their future well-being, which reflects the foreboding feelings of guilt and apprehension that Kierkegaard employs in his depiction of *angest*. My approach to *dukkha* and *angest* is original and fresh, and through my arguments I have demonstrate that their parallels are not limited to misleading word-associations but are engrained in human self-concern and desire for the continuation of self, and self-preservation. I conclude that this demonstrates a clear and significant relationship between Kierkegaard's understanding of human nature and that of Pāli texts, as it reveals how both perceive humanity as having a tendency to becoming self-asorbed, and as valuing themselves and their place in the world above the need for spiritual enhancement.

My research goes beyond the simple conclusion that both Kierkegaard and Buddhism recognise that human life is susceptible to psychological turmoil to address the complex role that both *angest* and *saṅkhārā-dukkha* play in enabling a person to establish their sense of self, for enabling them to recognise they are able to direct their lives and are responsible for their actions. My argument enhances and furthers the comparative study of Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism by exposing nuanced philosophical parallels between these two systems, and by introducing points of connection that are rooted in metaphysical and ontological assertions.

I proceeded in Chapter Three to broaden the comparisons I had begun to identify by examining the Pāli scriptures, teachings concerned with free will highlight how the select Buddhist teachings reject all forms of predetermination in the belief that a person always possesses the freedom of choice. In doing this, I was able to explain how teachings of the



Pāli Canon presents a position similar to Kierkegaard's with respect to the fact that a person is always morally accountable for their actions. I showed that this position from the perspective of Buddhism is supported by the notion of *cetanā*, which describes how a person's actions are directed by their volition or will and explains how a person is responsible and in control of their choices.<sup>713</sup> I argued that the Pāli texts advocate a system that is significantly similar to Kierkegaard's, with both asserting that the individual must take responsibility for their actions. Indeed, in both systems, moral responsibility intensifies a person's feelings of anxiety or *angest*, as it leads a person to worry about the metaphysical repercussions of their actions. Within Kierkegaard's system, this means that a person is existentially aware that they are accountable before God, with their eschatological status determined by God's judgement.<sup>714</sup> Although Buddhism does not have an equivalent divine figure for whom one is accountable, I have drawn on the works of scholars of Buddhism, including those of Peter Harvey, Wesley Teo and Asaf Federman, to argue that the Buddhist belief in *kamma* has the similar overall effect of increasing one's anxiety, to the extent that practitioners are concerned that their actions may impact the circumstances of their next rebirth.<sup>715</sup>

My argument demonstrates that Kierkegaard's *angest* denotes similar feelings of concern or anguish about one's future status. This is a significant development, not just in the comparative study of Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, but more generally in the field of comparative philosophy. This is because my work demonstrates that existing works in the comparative field of Buddhism and existentialism have been too quick to minimize

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<sup>713</sup>Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, p.220.

<sup>714</sup> Teo, 'Self-Responsibility in Existentialism and Buddhism', p.86.

<sup>715</sup> Federman, 'What Kind of Free Will Did the Buddha Teach?', p.3.

the role Kierkegaard's work has played in comparative study of existentialism and Buddhism. For instance, while scholars, such as Phra Medhihammaporn and Robert Miller, have recognised the relevance of existential angst for Buddhist thought, they have reduced Kierkegaard to little more than a footnote, failing to give him due credit by way of a detailed analysis of how his work relates to Buddhist ideas. My work has attempted to rectify this situation, by demonstrating how, and despite its theological assertions, Kierkegaard's existentialism possesses meaningful parallels with Buddhism, which consolidate some of the associations that have been made between Buddhism and existentialism more generally.

After addressing and re-evaluating the relationship between *angest* and *dukkha*, I moved on to establish new points of comparison between Kierkegaardian philosophy and the teachings of the Pāli texts, by likening Kierkegaard's model of suffering to the Buddhist notion of *samudaya*. My analysis here departs from an exclusive consideration of the existential writings of Kierkegaard to consider also his theological works. This move ensures that my comparative analysis is not only relevant to the study of comparative philosophy, but also comparative theology and religion. My research consequently identifies how significant aspects of Kierkegaard's existentialism and Buddhist philosophy can impact on the study of Christianity, notably, the role of human suffering in the Christian context of personal liberation.

In Chapter Four I sought initially to explain correspondences—as I saw them—between the concepts of *taṇhā* and Kierkegaard model of human suffering, in order to illustrate connections between Kierkegaard's philosophy and the Second Noble Truth. Throughout Chapter Four I explained how the three forms of *taṇhā*—*kāma-taṇhā*, *bhava-taṇhā* and *vibhava-taṇhā*—are reflected within Kierkegaard's collected writings, and subsequently

reveal how Kierkegaard takes into account the origins of a person's desires at particular stages of their life, and how these change in time according to their subjective priorities. By doing this I was able to explain how the concepts of *bhava-taṇhā* and *vibhava-taṇhā*—which have previously never been linked to Kierkegaard's philosophy—express striking resemblances with the specific desires that characterise Kierkegaard's concepts of the aesthete and the ethicist. I established a relationship between the aesthete and *vibhava-taṇhā* on the basis of Kierkegaard's portrayal of the aesthete as one who is prone to intensive bouts of melancholy when confronted with the meaninglessness of their existence. This vulnerability leads the aesthete to long for death as a release from their prolonged feelings of despair.<sup>716</sup> Due to the aesthete's inability to detach themselves from temporal pleasures, they are unable to establish a lasting sense of meaning or purpose. This ensures their persistent torment by feelings of hopelessness and insignificance, for they are unable to *will* themselves out of this torment and can only yearn for death as a release from their earthly misery. I argued that this relates to the notion of *vibhava-taṇhā*, which, as the Dalai Lama explains, can manifest as a longing to escape the sufferings of the temporal world, and as a longing for death in the hope of finding tranquillity beyond one's temporal existence.<sup>717</sup>

I argued that Kierkegaard's characterisation of the ethicist also reveals points of comparison with the concept of *taṇhā*, by drawing attention to the similarities between the ethicist's desire to ensure their continued existence and the notion of *bhava-taṇhā*. Irrespective of the differences between Kierkegaard and the teachings of the Pāli texts on the point of the possibility of eternal existence, there remains a clear resemblance between the ethicist's

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<sup>716</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, *Either/Or, Part II*, p.192.

<sup>717</sup> Sayadaw, *The Manuals of Dhamma*, p.191.

craving for eternal life and *bhava-taṇhā*. I demonstrated that both conceptions advocate that a person's attachment to the self acts as an obstacle to personal liberation that prevents a person from recognising the true temporal nature of their identity and reality as a whole. In this way, both the ethicist's desire and *bhava-taṇhā* binds the individual to the temporal world, preventing them from recognising their potential for self-overcoming.<sup>718</sup> The ethicist, like the unenlightened mind in Buddhism, continues to approach themselves in terms of their temporal identity, failing to realise that lasting satisfaction is not found in assuring one's continued existence, but in the eradication of their attachments to the temporal self; and thus, in the eradication of one's egotistical approach to life.

While the aesthete and ethicist provide strong parallels with the concepts of *vibhava-taṇhā* and *bhava-taṇhā* respectively, it is *kāma-taṇhā* that, I have argued, is reflected most vividly throughout Kierkegaard's writings. I maintain that this connection is rooted in the Buddhist belief that *kāma-taṇhā* is an obstacle to enlightenment, ensuring that the individual remains bound to *saṃsāra* through their cravings for sensual pleasure. This belief shares an affinity with Kierkegaard's work, in that Kierkegaard, too, asserts that in becoming consumed with the pleasures of the temporal world, the individual is prevented from, what he calls a 'turning inwards', meaning that they are unable to realise their potential to establish an abiding relationship with God. Both *kāma-taṇhā* and Kierkegaard's work concerning the perils of sensual desire, acknowledge that a pre-occupation with sensory pleasures is one of the primary causes of human suffering, for it causes one to value that which is temporary and impaired above that which is permanent and complete. Both systems of thought agree that pleasures bind humanity to the temporal world at the cost of their liberation, for a

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<sup>718</sup> Webster, *The Philosophy of Desire in the Buddhist Pāli Canon*, p.138.

person that is attached to worldly pleasures is unable to attain either *nibbāna* or a relationship with God.

By establishing the affinities between the concept of *taṇhā* and the writings of Kierkegaard, I have demonstrated that there are parallels, not only between *angest* and *dukkha*, but also between *samudaya* and Kierkegaard's model of suffering. By demonstrating this, I have revealed that both Kierkegaard and Buddhism consider human suffering to originate in human desire and in the human attachment to temporal phenomena. Furthermore, by refuting the existence of original sin, Kierkegaard creates a distinct approach to human existence, one that mirrors the central teachings of Buddhism, as it ultimately places the origin of a person's dissatisfaction with their own, personal, inability to control their desires.

Throughout Chapter Four, I also expounded on the important resemblances that are apparent in the approaches to enlightenment that are espoused by Kierkegaard and the Pāli Canon. In that chapter I explained that Kierkegaard proposes an unusual model of liberation within the context of Christianity, one that asserts that a person must first liberate themselves from human suffering before they can receive total salvation through God's grace. Whilst I have concluded that Kierkegaard's second model of liberation conflicts with Buddhist models, given its insistence on the role of divine benevolence in granting liberation, Kierkegaard's first model of liberation parallels the Pāli teaching of *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna*. In this case, both conceptions depict a state in which a person has overcome their worldly desires, and eradicated their attachments to the material world, and has consequently come to realise the true nature of reality.<sup>719</sup> I have demonstrated that both the Pāli scriptures and Kierkegaard assert that liberation from human suffering is attainable

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<sup>719</sup> Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p.292.

through individual endeavour, and not exclusively reliant on divine grace, and this is a human achievement born from the strengthening of mind.<sup>720</sup> By recognising these important affinities between Kierkegaard's first model of liberation and the Buddhist conception of *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna*, I have not only established a further point of comparison between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, but have also exposed an interesting dynamic between Christian theology and Buddhism more generally. In other words, I have exposed parallels between aspects of Christian theology and Buddhism that have traditionally been regarded as points of conflict. That is to say, the Buddhist concept of *nibbāna* is conventionally seen in conflict with the Christian idea of liberation, with *nibbāna* often associated with extinction, and the Christian idea of liberation associated with an eternal afterlife. However, by recognising that Kierkegaard presents a more complex, two-tiered model of liberation, I have been able to establish significant parallels between the Christian and Buddhist ideas of liberation.

I developed my evaluation of the similarities between their respective approaches to liberation throughout Chapter Five, in my novel comparison between the respective roles of Christ in Kierkegaard's philosophy, and the role of the Buddha according to the Pāli texts. This comparison helped me to introduce new innovative parallels between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism, that exposes the emphasis each system of thought gives to the role of the teacher and guide on the path to liberation. Of all chapters, it is Chapter Five that moves furthest into the domain of comparative theology or religion, for this chapter focuses exclusively on the theological musings of Kierkegaard, and thereby examines his Christology and his interpretation of faith. Therefore, while Chapter Four had begun to consider

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<sup>720</sup> Ibid, p.295.

Kierkegaard's existential writings of *Enten – Eller* [*Either/Or*] with his theological reflexions in *Evangeliet om Lidelser*, Chapter Five engages entirely with Kierkegaard's theology. This focus has enabled me to arrive at conclusions that are not only of relevance to comparative philosophy, but which is also significant in the field of comparative theology or religion—namely, those I identify from Kierkegaard's unique Christology and between Christ and the Buddha, all of which have been missed by previous commentators.

My comparative analysis in Chapter Five is rooted in Kierkegaard's approach to the humanity of Christ—a theme that is found within the work that he signs off as 'Kierkegaard', but is absent in his more popular pseudonymous works (an important fact that is often overlooked by commentators). By exploring this often-neglected aspect of Kierkegaard's Christology, I have been able to establish that Kierkegaard asserted that Christ, in his incarnation, voluntarily stripped himself of his metaphysical perfections, leaving himself vulnerable to the same cravings and pains that plague all human beings.<sup>721</sup> Christ is presented by Kierkegaard as having affinity with—and thus emphatic to—the human condition, as one who suffers similar toils and is thus able to establish a meaningful rapport and relationship with humanity. Kierkegaard identifies a humble Christ, who was born an outcast, and empathises with the hardships and needs of individual people.<sup>722</sup> By approaching Christ in anthropological terms, Kierkegaard reveals aspects of Christ that mirror the presentation of the Buddha found within the Pāli texts. Christ and the Buddha are similarly regarded as having suffered similar pains to all human beings, which means that the teachings of these figures are rooted in experiences that can appeal to all people. Equally, this means both figures are upheld as figures to emulate for they demonstrate

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<sup>721</sup> Ibid, p.292.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid, p.312.

human potential for the acquisition of enlightenment. By relinquishing his divine attributes, Kierkegaard suggests that Christ was forced to seek out liberation from human suffering, by freeing his mind from his desires. This position, I have argued, corresponds with the Buddhology found within the Pāli texts, as it suggests that, in similar respects to the Buddha, Christ had to discover the path to liberation for himself, and by finding the means to free himself from desire, Christ, again in similar respects to the Buddha, is able to demonstrate through his personal experiences the full extent of human capability. Kierkegaard presents Christ as one who teaches us from the position of his human experience, and not from the divine authority of his omniscience, and, as such, Kierkegaard's Christ reflects the status of the Buddha, as the "self-enlightened one," who was able to free himself from the drudgeries of *samsāra*.<sup>723</sup>

This comparison has significant implications for the field of comparative theology as it presents a model for the overcoming of human desires through human endeavour. It, accordingly, establishes a meaningful connection between Christian theology and Buddhism, through the common portrayal of the endeavour of their respective founder for overcoming the human condition through the mastery of their mind and their focus on the spiritual over the temporal. This, in turn, also exposes interesting new avenues of thought and research into human nature and its liberation from suffering and anxiety, for Kierkegaard recognises that before one can relate to God in a meaningful way, one must eradicate the ego, overcome profane desires, and sever attachments to the temporal world. He places the desire for worldly pleasures and the inevitable dissatisfaction this causes at the centre of Christian spirituality and suggests that material desires keep humans apart

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<sup>723</sup>'*Khandhasamyutta*' (SN 22:58), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p.901.



from God, and not—as was conventionally thought in his time—original sin. By arguing for this, Kierkegaard places responsibility for establishing relationship with God on the shoulders of every individual, forcing them to overcome their finite flaws, and to recognise their infinite potential. This means that a person’s liberation from human suffering is an individual endeavour, achievable only through a person’s ability to conquer their own mind. Kierkegaard therefore eradicates the need for God’s intervention (through his grace or salvation) from this initial stage of liberation, thereby granting divine grace a role only in his secondary or final stage of liberation. By doing this, Kierkegaard underscores the human power to liberate the self from human suffering.

I have argued that Kierkegaard’s approach to liberation parallels the approach to enlightenment as explored in the Pāli texts, with emphasis given, in both cases, to the individual’s capacity to overcome their desires. Both models remove the need to rely solely on a deity for salvation. Correspondingly, Kierkegaard’s work also rejects the idea that it is original sin that separates humanity and God, as he argues that it is human desire that separates the two, in its capacity to bind humans to the temporal world, keeping them apart from the spiritual domain. Again, this introduces new points of discussion within the field of comparative philosophy as it reveals that the Buddhist understanding of *dukkha* explores the human condition in terms that are pertinent to Christians. For instance, those Christians who endorse Kierkegaard’s theology, may find Buddhist practices, such as *vipassanā* meditation, as a valuable support and means of achieving insight into the limited nature of reality. Likewise, Kierkegaard’s theology could serve as a useful position for the mediation of intra-faith dialogue, as it could enable Christians to recognise the spiritual value in Buddhist meditative techniques to overcome the human condition, and, in turn, help them to move closer to God.

With all this in mind, it is evident that my research proffers an original contribution to—and enrichment of—the academic study of the relationship between Kierkegaardian philosophy and Buddhism. It critiques current scholarship in the field and identifies important weaknesses in it. But rather than simply identifying these weakness, it draws from them, and builds upon them to help shift their focus away from unhelpful discussions about the etymology of words, and how certain words resonate with meanings in others, to a more involved and considered account of how specific ideas in Kierkegaard’s writings complement the teachings of the Pāli texts. In arguing for these parallels, my thesis is applicable and relevant to the academic studies of comparative philosophy and comparative theology alike. I hope I have demonstrated that Kierkegaard’s work is as relevant to Buddhism as Nietzsche’s or Sartre’s when approaching Buddhism from the perspective of existential philosophy.

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