For Idea and Reality.

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After Death,

A Contribution to the Elucidation of the Law of Selfhood.

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[193] How strange a guest Death is, after all! He moves about in the throng, yet minds his own business; he goes in and out of men's houses like an old servant, a kind of official person, with whose office the race has long since become familiar. Mute and still, the man with the scythe performs his accustomed work, an ordinary everyday business, a work that all know, and that yet, when the question is put concerning it, no one knows, for the work itself is a riddle, an impenetrable secret. He who has tried what sorrow is can join in the talk of sorrows, and the memory of sorrows will make him eloquent; he whom misfortune has once struck can join in the talk of misfortune, and the reflection of terror and anguish can still lend flashes to his speech; but he whom Death has struck cannot join in the talk, cannot betray with a single word what has happened: the dead man is silent about what he knows; the Bony One has, as though for prudence's sake, pressed a seal of silence upon his lips.

Just as Death's work is a secret, so also the hour, the moment, in which it will *[194]* present itself, is on the whole a secret as well. He who on official business travels about the country and inspects the tills likes best to come upon the party concerned unawares, in order to find out whether the accounts are in order. One might almost believe that Death went on a similar errand, for it loves to take men by surprise. Sometimes, through sickness and pain, notice is given that now the moment is near, now the Silent One is coming with his scythe; and then it was only his shadow that went past the door: there is no hurry; but one day, when all is well, and no one is thinking of anything, he steps suddenly in and does his duty. From this sensible people have drawn the lesson that, in order not to be taken by surprise, we must always be prepared for Death. It is a good and sound and practical lesson, if only we knew in what the preparation is really to consist.

To prepare oneself for Death is, in bourgeois practice, commonly understood of what is called "setting one's house in order", whether by amassing a fortune and making a will, or by paying into the widows' fund or the annuity, by, in short, securing for the survivors a livelihood. When this has been duly seen to, a bourgeois consciousness says confidently to itself: "now I am prepared, now I can die on any day it may be, for the account is in order". That such a preparation may be in the highest degree respectable and necessary, we must concede; it betrays prudent care

and a loving mind to provide for those nearest to one; a man who has fulfilled these conditions can leave the world honorably and receive an honorable burial: the funeral oration will not omit his praise.

But if preparing oneself for Death consists exclusively in having the survivors *[195]* provided for, then there must surely be many who are exempt from preparing themselves; the solitary have no need of it, for they have no one in the world to provide for; nor have the rich, for the heirs will surely know how to provide for themselves; the poor, yes, the poor might sorely need a preparation, but they have, alas, nothing with which to prepare themselves. To prepare oneself for Death must, if the demand is to hold for all, necessarily be understood of preparing oneself for a state after death. But — after death? this state is, after all, entirely unknown; how can one prepare for the entirely unknown? One can prepare for something real, something determined beforehand, something of which one knows that it will necessarily occur; one can, for example, be composed and prepared for an earthquake, an eclipse of the sun, an unavoidable war, the loss of one's fortune, etc. The greater the certainty about what is to come, be it sad or joyful, the more straightforward is the task of preparation; but conversely, the more indefinite and indefinable what is to come, the more painful and precarious is the preparation. To prepare for the possible is already far more difficult than to prepare for the necessary; but to prepare for all possible possibilities, and the entirely unknown looks like all possible possibilities, is impossible. It is presumably this last consideration above all that is to serve as an excuse for the many who, filled with the bustle of life, have neither time nor desire to brood over that enigmatic unknown — after death.

And what does Death say then? Well, Death says naturally nothing; and yet, when the Hollow-eyed One draws near and stares at one, it is lifelike as though Silence *[196]* itself became eloquent, as though it really said something. "After death! Man, you lie to yourself when you imagine that you know nothing at all and can know nothing about the state after death. You call my nature enigmatic, and enigmatic the land to which the journey leads; for that very reason I advise you, before you go aboard my emigrant ship, to make my closer acquaintance. Give me a name, call me what you will, a crude force of nature, an executioner of souls, a spirit from hell, an emissary from heaven; but one thing is demanded unconditionally: you shall say what you take me to be; you shall have a judgment, a decisive judgment about me, you shall; for your judgment about me is your own judgment about yourself: dig into your innermost, and there you will find the key to my riddle".

That man's judgment about Death is a judgment about his own self can, with a little reflection, easily be made plain. He who says that Death extinguishes the light of consciousness and annihilates life says, in the same breath, that his own self, the being on which his consciousness, his feelings, representations, memories, etc. rest, vanishes in death. It is the self that sees in the stream of corruptibility its own image and its own law; it is the self that plunges into the stream; it is the self that condemns itself to death. "But scientific physiology has expressly proved that the law of selfhood is only an organic natural law". False, false! Physiology knows nothing, nothing at all, about the law of selfhood. The laws to which physiology refers all activities of life and soul in the human body are mere physical laws, laws for the selfless. The
[197] only thing physiology can do for him who would ask its judgment on the question of immortality is to confirm him in the delusion that the soul, which cannot be thought without a body, can impossibly form for itself a body of a higher order when the earthly one is dissolved. But in order to be confirmed in this delusion, one need not study physiology; one arrives more easily at the result by quite simply surrendering to the testimony of the senses. Homer is no scientific physiologist, but he has, as everyone with an open natural sense must have, a strong, overwhelming impression that the body is the soul's reality. The soul vanishes like "a shadow, a dream", when it leaves "the whitish bones". Significant is the exclamation of surprise with which the shade of Achilles at the entrance to the underworld addresses Odysseus: "Scion of Zeus, son of Laertes, Odysseus, cunning one! Why have you ventured down to Hades, where the dead have their home, beings without consciousness, phantoms of men who have lived out their lives?" That myth gives the shades an existence in Hades is an obscure intimation of the validity of the law of selfhood. At the very moment when the understanding, dazzled by sense impressions, would make the soul into a nothing, the immediate feeling of self reacts; imagination makes the understanding's nothing into something again and holds the fleeting something fast as a shadow.

The Greek conception of the realm of shadows is far from having vanished with faith in Greek mythology; the old myth lives still in thousands and thousands of souls, frightens them in secret and fills them with hidden dread of death; for the myth is in the obscurity of the mind, in the unclear self, which is a stranger to its own being. What wonder that a man in the midst of the splendor of the world of the senses has a
[198] stifling foreboding of the realm of shadows, as long as his real self is not yet much more than a shadow. To live in such an intermediate state is intolerable; it is almost like being buried alive.

In most people, accordingly, there is also an endeavor to free themselves from the intermediate state; but the means employed will not always answer to the end. There are those who regard diversions and many kinds of outward-going interests as a good narcotic, and there are those for whom daily work, in combination with cares of livelihood and all manner of temporal worries, gives quite enough to think about; but all this is uncertain. An unexpected accident, a death that really goes to one's heart, can suddenly darken the vision and conjure the shades from Hades forth in the startled imagination. Just as in the hot countries a snake or crocodile buried in the mire can surface and frighten the wayfarer, so the question, the uncanny question of the state after death, can suddenly rise up and throw mind and thoughts into turmoil. If the fear is to be overcome, the matter must be taken up from the ground; this thought seems indeed to be gaining more and more currency with advancing enlightenment.

The modern knowing self-consciousness is already tolerably clear with itself that this business of the soul's immortality or, as we in this connection prefer to express it, of the eternity of the self, is an old fable, a nursery tale, which belongs in the nursery. The self, an organic product of nature, arises in time and perishes in time, this is one of the great discoveries of metaphysical self-knowledge, the yield of centuries of brooding, a fruitful result for clear, indeed water-clear heads. If there is any deception in this, then it comes not from science — science is quite innocent — but from the *[199]* self, which has misread and misused science. It is not a physical natural law, but a law of selfhood, that lies at the ground of the judgment. It is the self that in this matter has to do exclusively with itself; it is the self that, in order to get out of the stifling uncertainty, with full composure prepares itself for death, makes its will, and bequeaths to itself annihilation.

There are presumably those who regard the choice of such a way out as a sign of despair, since the thought of an annihilation is so dreadful. This is a rather naive view; for he who is truly assured of his annihilation has nothing to dread. People speak of the night of death, of the darkness of the grave, of the loneliness in "the cold, narrow chamber", etc., mere childish imaginings. There is no darkness in the grave, no loneliness in the coffin; for him who is annihilated in death there is, literally speaking, neither light nor darkness, neither company nor loneliness: the dead man himself is not even in the grave, for he is not at all.

There are those who hold that everyone who has condemned his soul to annihilation has committed a spiritual suicide, a crime that in the end must bring with it such

weariness of life that the criminal ends by taking his own life. In this way of looking at things, too, no small misunderstanding lies hidden. Suicide is indeed always a possible way out for him who, dead to eternity, lives in his innermost being on a nothing; but it heightens self-esteem again to know that man has his own life unconditionally in his
[200] own hand. It is so far from the case that the thought of annihilation should without further ado give individuals a distaste for living, that the opposite is far rather the case. He who knows, or at any rate believes he knows, within himself that all is over with death can quite acquire a desire, an immense desire to use and enjoy this brief present life. Once the thought of annihilation has from the ground up severed the self from all that is eternal and made it a temporal being, then this temporal being must sink deep into the temporal, acquire a greedy appetite for the temporal, nourish itself on it and live in it as in its only proper, original element. Only he knows how to live who rightly knows how to satisfy life's demands. The highest satisfaction is temporal self-satisfaction; temporal self-satisfaction is enjoyment. To win the conditions of enjoyment, one must work. Work is the means, enjoyment the end; work is the law, enjoyment the gospel; that is the religion of the age. The present is all, after death is nothing; that is the philosophy of the age. The religion of the present day is wholly absorbed in its philosophy: its faith is in truth one with its knowledge.

But the ideas, yes, them we had nearly forgotten; the ideas must of course be included, if the whole is to be complete. The great world-ideas in politics and history, the ideas of beauty in poetry and art, the ideas of the true in the sciences, all this belongs essentially to the present real life. The ideas have the unmistakable advantage that they are at once both earthly and supra-earthly; they furnish a guarantee that the omnipresent eternal is in every way prepared to serve the temporal. The modern eternity is liberal; it is a great convenience about the eternal ideas that they are at
[201] bottom so modest. The creditors of temporality are not modest; on the contrary, they are importunate, crude realists, of whom one cannot be rid until one has paid to the last farthing. But the eternal ideas do not present themselves as creditors; they are humane, disinterested beings. If one understands how to use them, good! then they let themselves be used, by many even with inconceivable success and astonishing, brilliant effect. If one has no use for them and does not wish to have anything further to do with them, good! then they withdraw with a smile, and one notices no reproach. It shall then not be said that the self which will be annihilated in death has shut itself out from eternity, far from it! While other souls must make do with hope, the hope that after death they shall at last enter into eternity, this self has made hope

superfluous, and having forestalled Death, has, instead of itself entering into eternity, let eternity come to meet it by entering into time.

We have, it is said, full compensation for immortality when we are willing to live for ideas. But in order to complete the law of selfhood, we must surely take note of what it really means to live for ideas. Naive souls, who readily let enthusiasm run away with them, like to conceive the matter as though living for an idea were the same as making oneself the instrument of the idea, sacrificing everything for the idea's sake, having one's life in the service of the idea. It is a beautiful turn of phrase, but a skewed conception of the relation. On our chosen standpoint it cannot possibly be the idea that is unconditionally to rule over the self; according to the law of selfhood it must necessarily be the self that is to rule the idea. Let us begin with love; the enthusiasts say that they love the idea for its own sake; that may be granted, inasmuch as they mean thereby that it is the idea that procures them the greatest pleasures, *[202]* gives their life the richest sunshine, and through all the vicissitudes of struggle and rest, sorrow and joy affords them the highest self-satisfaction. One can then love the idea for its own sake, as one can love a young girl for her own sake: love lasts as long as self-satisfaction lasts; self-satisfaction lasts as long as desire lasts, and desire — as long as enjoyment lasts. But not a moment longer. Take enjoyment away, and desire goes away too, and when desire is gone, what is then to give love nourishment? Duty! That is a self-deception. If there is no disposition for eternity, no germ of eternal life, in the self, how should it then be able to feel obliged to sacrifice itself for something that is contrary to its nature? It is a monstrous contradiction to want to oblige a temporal self to work for eternal ends. The idea of justice, for example, no human being with a clear understanding can ascribe unconditional validity to; justice stands in the service of prudence and is to be applied according to circumstances. The duty of justice is a duty of compulsion, and every duty of compulsion ceases with the compulsion. The weak must be just toward the strong, but not conversely. The smaller state ought to fulfill its obligations to the letter and show itself just toward the greater; but does a great power therefore always need to be just toward a small power? The same holds of the idea of goodness. Everyone who does the good must, if he is honest, admit that he does not really do it for the good's sake, but for his own sake, because it affords him satisfaction. If, on the other hand, anyone would unconditionally do the good for the good's sake, then he would have to be willing to *[203]* do it even in the case that it were for himself an evil, were repugnant to him; but that is a glaring contradiction.

There is a philosophical ethics which, although it quite sincerely denies the eternity of the self, the immortality of the soul, nonetheless in a metaphysical preaching tone speaks with unction of the unconditional claim of the good and the true upon conscience, of man's obligation to do the good even to the extreme degree of self-denial, etc. It is an ambiguous ethics, which speaks with two tongues. If the germ of eternity has been torn out of the self to the last fiber, then there can be no judgment of eternity in conscience. A temporal being can no more be obliged to stake its life on an eternal good than a fish can be obliged to sing or an ape to study thoroughbass. Starting from the temporal, the movement of the idea passes unceasingly through the eternal back into the temporal; this circular movement is the exact formula of the law of selfhood: the temporal is the point of departure, and the temporal is the goal; eternity, the fleeting intermediary, acquires significance only by casting luster upon the temporal and furnishing stimulants for the present.

If one imagines that one can scare the life out of this view by howling that the sacred is trampled underfoot, that the moral powers are mocked, and the foundation of human society is undermined, then a Corybantic din against an ethical eclipse of the moon will be without any significance. Here there is no ground for din, but a serious summons to think. It by no means follows from the position set up that
[204] lawfulness, order and morality should go under or even merely suffer any real loss. Although the human self is not eternal, it cannot nevertheless, as long as it lives, cease to be rational. The rational thing is that man in the consciousness of himself has a consciousness both of the temporal and of the eternal, of the temporal as reality, of the eternal as semblance. The truth is that the eternal, which, when it is taken by itself and ascribed independent validity, is an empty thought, an imagination, is nonetheless of extraordinary effect when it is bent under the temporal and goes together with the finite. It goes with the eternal in consciousness as with space in outer nature. Space in and for itself, pure infinite space, is nothing, is only pure, infinite emptiness; and yet real bodies could not exist without space. So with the eternal. Eternity in itself is nothing, and yet rational human life cannot possibly exist without the thought of eternity. The law of gravity shows how distances, that is, spatial relations, gain influence on the activity of forces; the law of selfhood shows how ideas, that is, relations of eternity, gain influence on the activity of reason. Truth and goodness, duty and right, these indispensable conditions of social life, will not vanish from the earth because the empty representation of the soul's immortality at last vanishes for the self.

The foundation of all morality is sincerity, honesty and uprightness. The great mass of industrious, staid, decent citizens, who in all states are the best supports of the existing order, give eloquent testimony that the concepts: right and duty, are borrowed from the temporal and find application only to the temporal. Whatever *[205]* higher intimations the individual may have of a true holiness, a perfect justice, an eternal retribution, whether he has these intimations from pastor and parish clerk or from his own inner life, he must yet, if he wishes to be sincere, admit that such ideal representations are excluded from the exchange, from the marketplace, from the great world market, that they do not hold at all in trade and conduct, that they find, to speak plainly, no real application to real things. "Everyone is a thief in his trade". If all could agree to make this admission, a number of high-flown phrases would indeed vanish, but in return there would come far more agreement between word and deed, far more reliability, plainness and naturalness into social relations.

To be sure, there is something revolting to the immediate feeling in the fact that Death, in the moral sense too, makes all equal. The noble man dies, and the scoundrel dies, and Death draws a black line through the account, and erases the difference between virtue and vice. This cool impartiality makes, however, when we reflect aright, a grand moral impression; it subdues the selfish and cools passion.

It is, after all, an absurdity that a man should count as disinterested who here in the world does the good without reward, and why? Because the person will not let himself be satisfied with the trifle of reward that the present can offer him, but screws the price up to such a height that a whole eternity is needed to pay him his reward. What beautiful disinterestedness! A poor wretched laborer, who spurns a *[206]* wage of ten rix-dollars on Monday in the hope that by a strike it will rise to double, if only he can wait till next Saturday, is not thus disinterested. The much-praised disinterestedness that sends the screwed-up bills in to the bureau of eternity is a supreme self-interest, a cunning strike of insatiable selfishness. Against this strike Death, the strong employer, must hold his ground: we are all, after all, Death's day laborers — from Death's office no payment is made; after death there is no wage, for after death there is nothing.

From the other side too the thought, rightly viewed, is uplifting, great and moral. When the unjust man — the robber, the deceiver, the murderer — dies, then all the upright feel how beneficent it is that Death keeps justice and sets a limit to crime. Then the upright kiss Death's hand and praise his good deeds. But the exceedingly virtuous, those disinterested souls who wait for the great reward, are not content

with such a simple act of justice. As a supplement to merit, an extra gratuity to the reward yonder, they demand into the bargain the refined enjoyment that, while they themselves are rewarded throughout a whole eternity, the ungodly man shall in their sight be punished throughout a whole eternity, shall without mercy or pardon suffer the eternal torments of hell, what an insatiable feeling of vengeance! It is, after all, a beautiful and exalted trait in Death's character that he scorns to give such a passion nourishment. Cold Death extinguishes the fire of vengeance: after death there is no punishment, for after death — there is nothing.

[207] In sharp opposition to the doctrine of annihilation stands now the Gospel of the resurrection of the dead, a word of revelation that is inseparably one with the Gospel of Christ's resurrection. Either — Or; either believe in Christ's resurrection and reject the doctrine of annihilation, or reject the Gospel of the Risen One and believe in annihilation; a third is not given. To a superficial view one would indeed think that there was not merely a third, but a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, so many exertions are made to avoid "the great extremes" and to fit out for oneself a doctrine of immortality more tempered to the line of thought of the age and of an enlightened reason. But that leads to nothing; it *is impossible*. The many half-scientific projects of immortality that rationalistic enlightenment has brought to light are in their innermost ground not a hair better than the many unscientific projects of perpetual motion that the half-educated rogues of natural philosophy bring to light. Both kinds of projects have this in common, that they stand in conflict with the laws, the former with the laws of spirit, the latter with the laws of nature.

The law of selfhood is the fundamental law of spirit. It is this law to which every question about the state after death must be led back; it is this law that must guide us in judging the many parables, images and symbols under which the beyond is described to us in the divine word.

In the doctrine of annihilation the law of selfhood is, as has been shown above, determined as a law of temporality; according to the Gospel it becomes, as we shall now see, decisive to determine as a law of eternity; one of two things: *either* the
[208] nature of the soul must be conceived in such a way that the self, sprung from the the selfless, the material, after a temporal consciousness of itself and of what is universal in reason returns to its origin in the material and vanishes into the selfless; or the soul must be conceived in such a way that it, sprung from the divine self, and thus eternal according to its principle, enters unconsciously into temporality, that on temporal conditions it can develop the consciousness of the eternity of its being, and, enriched

with the yield of development, return to its source. It will now appear that all that the Gospel communicates to us with divine authority about the resurrection of the dead is neither more nor less than what can serve precisely to awaken a living view and personal assurance of the fulfilment of the law of selfhood.

To understand this, it is necessary to lay aside old prejudices and to sweep the musty, matted web of theological-dogmatic representations out of consciousness.

When someone is about to travel to America or to New Holland, it is in order that he should in every possible way seek to procure the most reliable information about the continent unknown to him, its climate, its rivers and mountains, animals and plants, about the inhabitants, what they live on, how they dress, and so forth. But in this way one cannot procure information about the world to come, about the state after death. But, it is said, Christ and the Apostles surely must know the facts; let us hold to their words, and so we shall receive reliable information. In this way the theologians have from the beginning done their part to fortify the congregations in the fixed idea that the coming world was a kind of supraterrestrial Australia or New *[209]* Holland, from which, by the aid of passages of Scripture and visionary considerations, treated, so to speak, in a dogmatic-scientific manner, one was in a position to procure the most reliable reports. What the case is with these reports can be seen on every page of the history of dogma.

It has cost exertions to find out what the case is with the "intermediate state", but it has cost still greater exertion to get it quite exactly settled how the resurrection of the dead is actually to proceed.

"According to the concordant doctrine of the orthodox teachers of the church, the Scholastics and the Protestant theologians, in the resurrection the same body is restored with the same constituents as it had in earthly life, with skin and hair, entrails, bones and teeth — for how else could gnashing of teeth take place in hell? asked Jerome. But now one was at once in embarrassment about the hairs. Christ had said that not one hair of our head should be lost (Luc. 21:18). But how hideous the body would become, exclaimed Augustine, who connected this passage with the resurrection, if the whole length of the head-hair and beard gradually cut off, and perhaps also of the nails, were again to grow back to it in the resurrection. It was a stroke of luck that the Lord had said in another place that all our hairs were numbered (Matth. 10:30); for in this one saw a comforting hint that with the restitution only the number, not the length of the hairs, was meant. But what if someone had had too few hairs in this life? Bodily defects of every kind, Augustine holds, are corrected *[210]*

in the pious at the resurrection, excess of fatness and leanness evened out; yet in such a way that the basic features of the former shape, which are necessary to make the person recognizable, are not effaced.... The imagination had great difficulty in picturing how someone who, to use Luther's words, has left a leg in Hungary, another whom wild beasts have torn or dragged to death, or whom the fishes in the sea have eaten, should at the resurrection again come by these limbs.... A more conspicuous difficulty lay in the one case, which the Church Fathers had already set up, that a man in a famine had eaten of another's corpse: whether, that is, the piece of flesh in question should rise as a part of the man to whom it originally belonged, or of the one who had afterwards assimilated it into himself by digestion? In the latter case the first lacked a definite, bounded piece of his body, in the former the second lost all the constituents he had appropriated by eating the piece. Augustine awards the disputed piece of flesh to the original possessor and lets God give back to the other the evaporated parts of flesh, after having gathered them from the air."[1)]

This only as a little foretaste for those whose teeth water easily whenever they catch a whiff from the theological kitchen. A warming-up of the old dishes one still finds in every second "Christian dogmatics", only that the strength is considerably
[211] thinned out. In the older writers the eschatological investigations are conducted with great vividness and naive boldness, in the more recent with anxious caution and infinite insipidity: that is the whole difference.

We hold to the law of selfhood. The soul is immortal, for the self is eternal; this is no object of knowledge, but an unavoidable object of faith. "I am the resurrection and the life", says Christ (Joh. 11:25–26): "he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" — Yes, believest thou this? On the answering of this question every single soul must then keep its whole attention gathered. If the question is misunderstood, the answer must be accordingly. And it is in truth misunderstood when one takes Christ's words as if he wished to say: "You shall trust blindly in me, for I am the outward, historically personified authority. When I tell you that there is an eternal life, then there is an eternal life, and that must be enough for you". With this misunderstanding the representation of Christ's resurrection as an outward, directly provable fact stands in close connection. "If we did not", it is said, "have it in the letter of Scripture in black and white that Christ is truly risen from the dead, then we should know nothing, we should not know at all what hope we might make

[1)] D. F. Strauss. The Christian Doctrine of Faith (Den kristelige Troeslære). Vol. 2; 3rd section, § 103.

for ourselves about our state after death; but now, since it is shown by Scripture that Christ is risen, just as surely, for historical reasons just as provably, as that Julius Caesar was murdered by Brutus, and Napoleon deported to St. Helena, now we know, yes now we know, that the dead shall rise to eternal life".

How much such an explanation conflicts with the law of selfhood is obvious. *[212]* The self will see with its own eye, the knowing self with the eye of knowledge, the believing self with the eye of faith. The assurance of an eternal life is in the deepest sense a self-assurance; but an original self-assurance cannot possibly be attained by forgetting oneself in order to listen to another, looking away from oneself in order to look at another, giving up one's own self and throwing oneself in the dust before another. Is this the spirit in Christ's words? It is surely a spiritless distortion. Christ does not speak of himself as of an outward object; he speaks of his being. He does not say: I have from heaven information that after death there follows a life and a resurrection; but he aims at the self and says to man: I am what you inwardly seek, I am the resurrection and the life.

Believest thou this? "No!" answers modern criticism. "I do not believe it, for I do not *believe* at all. I am, as science can bear witness, not a believer, but a knower. Faith is for the common people, empty doubting for the half-educated; but men of thought with the clear concept win firm conviction in knowledge". One doubtless does such an utterance too much honor by crossing oneself at its boldness, as at a ghastly sign of something demonic; one comes nearer to the truth by taking the declaration straightforwardly for what it is, a sign of immaturity in thought, a complete misconception of the law of selfhood. The eternity of the self cannot, as has been shown elsewhere[1)] possibly be cognized in objective knowledge, it must necessarily *[213]* be cognized in faith. The thought of faith is in its kind just as strictly convincing as the thought of knowledge.

The thought of faith grounded in the law of selfhood is in all respects true to itself, has everywhere the same distinguishing mark. The weakened self must come to strength, the dim, clouded self must clear itself in the light of the true self. The soul's insight into its own being is conditioned by its insight into the being of Christ. The power of inwardness with which the believer holds fast the hope of the resurrection rests on that strength of feeling, that earnestness of will, thus on that power of faith, of inwardness, with which he is able to grasp the eternal life in Christ's resurrection. The faith in immortality can then be distorted in two ways, in that man either one-

[1)] Cf. the author's Philosophy of Religion, pp. 28–46; 88–97; 390–93.

sidedly relies on his own self-assurance or just as one-sidedly builds on the objective contemplation of an outward historical phenomenon.

Superficially viewed, it would indeed seem as if man, according to the law of selfhood, were referred exclusively, or at any rate chiefly, to himself alone. The matter is then conceived thus. The individual says to himself: "As surely as I am immortal, I must by my own reason be able to discover the germ of immortality in the dispositions of my being. I look at Christ; he had unshakable certainty of the eternal life, that is true. He foretold his resurrection and went willingly to his death, there is something uplifting in that, something wonderfully great and divine. But all of that cannot help me, if I cannot in myself, by myself attain the same certainty. If I cannot attain it, what does it help then that I read and read four disputed and highly discordant accounts
[214] of the miracle of the resurrection? If I can attain it, then I must say, I suppose, that Christ has been a helper to me only in so far as, by his word and his example, he has been to me an occasion for deeper self-understanding; but this my self-understanding stands wholly independent of the historical element in his resurrection".

Has any man on these terms ever grasped the eternal life? It is no effeminate mysticism of piety that we would recommend in opposition to this. Christ is not a selfish, ambitious ruler who will not grant men a little "moral independence" for fear that someone might perhaps be able to help himself without needing him. He has indeed souls enough who, merely to be rid of the moral law, load him with submissive attendance, fawn upon him and pay his grace compliments. For it is, as touched on above, precisely the second breach of the law of selfhood that the soul will merely behave passively toward the Revealer, will contemplate in pious idleness his suffering, death and resurrection as a sacred spectacle, an official gala performance, that objectively unveils the secrets of the Eternal. That is the Christianity of the enjoyment of ideas, of aesthetic dogmatism and of phrases, a quite agreeable Christianity, which has only the one fault, that it never brings life and incorruptibility to light.

Against both errors of the age, moralism and aestheticizing dogmatism, the law of selfhood holds firmly back. The latter error would soon be eradicated, if it did not have something opiate-like and fragrant, something soothing, pleasant to an age nerve-weak in everything spiritual, about it. For everyone knows that it is an error, and no one wishes to be openly known as holding it. If the error went about naked
[215] with death under its arm, then even the children in the street would point fingers and say: fie, what an ugly error that Christianity of ease is. But the error is not so ill-bred

as to go naked; it knows how to dress, and it has costumes enough, more than any empress.

The error of moralism enjoys greater respect; there is as it were something grand about it. Yet anyone who will look a little more closely can easily see that it bears heavily a self-contradiction. Yes, if the moralist could make himself a Christ, could by his own power fill his soul with truth, righteousness and love of God and neighbour in such a measure that he could with good conscience say to himself: "I too am, before Abraham was, the resurrection and the life", then he would certainly be right. But to take the matter from this side surely never occurs to him; he is, after all, a reasonable man. So with him we come upon another road. He concedes that his being is not unconditionally one with the eternal truth, the eternal righteousness, the eternal love, but that in the spirit of truth and love he feels himself obliged to strive, strive and strive after righteousness. Here is the fundamental contradiction; for what I merely strive after, that I do not have; and what I do not have, but yet strive after in the infinite, is precisely that which I infinitely need.

So the moralist, the reasonable man, then needs infinitely the assurance of the eternity of life, because he, as the restlessness of his ethical striving shows, infinitely needs eternal life. On what terms does he reach the satisfaction, the high goal toward which he strives? Not in and through himself; for in and through himself he has only *[216]* the need. Nor through a stranger, one standing outside; for that which is to satisfy him in spirit and truth must, even if it comes to meet him from without, yet announce itself in him from within as the holy ground of life, the bread of eternity that satisfies the soul because it is one with the soul's original being.

This is the condition of faith, the fulfilment of the law of selfhood, that the human self in infinite self-activity shall draw its nourishment from Christ's self, shall receive life from his life, light from his light, i.e. live by his resurrection. The assurance of Christ's resurrection as a really historical fact thus goes most inwardly together with the personal appropriation of Christ's being. But this assurance is sacramental. He who has not taken the sacrament upon it that Christ is really risen from the dead, he may insist on the historical element as much as he likes, and grub physiologically in brains and nerves as deep as he likes: he never gets the better of the smouldering doubt, never comes to full assurance of eternal life after death.

By looking away from the kernel and keeping to the shells, i.e. by conceiving Christ's discourses not as a divine clarification of the being of the self, a light of life and of resurrection, which in the night of souls dispels the darkness of death, but as a kind

of statistical description of the state in the other world, topographical contributions to a travel map, so that the dead, like undaunted tourists, can find roads and paths exactly everywhere; yes, what is more, that the still living can beforehand almost get to see
[217] all the sights both in heaven and hell, Christian dogmaticians have made it easy for dissolving criticism to stir the whole sum of heterogeneous representations together into a self-contradictory confusion and to lower the doctrine of the resurrection in the eyes of the so-called cultivated. If the word of life about the resurrection of the dead is only to be regarded as a doctrine, then our Lord Christ does not even have the honor of being the first inventor of this doctrine; one may think of the mythologies and, as regards his nearest surroundings, especially of the Pharisees. Christ has thus merely improved the doctrine, added a couple of paragraphs to the doctrine, and if it should perhaps, according to biblical-theological researches, when these are continued thoroughly for yet a couple of thousand years, finally turn out that the accounts of the gospels are tolerably credible — confirmed the doctrine by his own resurrection.

A conspicuous testimony to the dogmatic spiritlessness lies directly in this, that Christ's various statements, when they are taken literally as factual information about the beyond, can easily be interpreted so that they come into manifest conflict with one another. In the parable e.g. of the rich man (Luk. 16) the transition from death to life occurs suddenly, both to blessed joy and to eternal torment; and an equally sudden transition is indicated in the promise to the robber on the cross: (Luk. 23:43). But according to Joh. 5:28 the final awakening to life is designated in such a way that the dead are first raised up from the graves when they "hear the voice of the Son of God". The departed must thus rest in the bosom of the earth until the last day; for which reason an old Arabian sect of Christians held that the soul died with the body and was first at the final resurrection called to life with the body. Just as evident
[218] is, according to criticism, the unclear wavering between a Jewish carnality and an Alexandrian spirituality in the whole description. The carnality is that the state of the blessed is likened to a great banquet. "Many shall come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matth. 8:11); for which reason the congregation too believes in the resurrection of the flesh. But the spirituality is that the carnal difference between man and woman is effaced to such a degree that they become pure angels (Matth. 22, Luk. 20, Mark. 12); an empty, tedious spiritualism, which corresponds but little to the resurrection of the flesh.

From this one will gather what good of a scientific kind comes out of the endless

wrestling between dogmatics and criticism. Everywhere that Christ speaks of the life to come he speaks in parables; but these parables are pictures of life, in which the eternal truth itself takes shape. As uplifting and soul-shaking, consoling and terrible as these pictures of truth are when, in the light of the spirit, they dawn upon the inner sight, fill the self and set the powers of the mind in motion, so great again is the confusion when either a selfishly excited imagination takes the word in vain, or a sober, spiritually poor understanding takes it into its head to set them up as prospects for outward, sensory orientation. Each parable, each picture makes the truth vivid with such great peculiarity and in such striking immediacy that here there can be no thought of bringing the individual pictures into objective systematic connection. The connection is in the fundamental view, not in the pictorial designation. They are turning-points, great decisive principal points that each time on a particular occasion, *[219]* in a particular connection are illuminated.

A couple of examples. Christ says to his disciples (Matth. 19:28): "Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel". But to the scribes and Pharisees, who wished to see a sign from him, he says in another place (Matth. 12:41–42): "The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here". Who now will be in a position to bring these two statements into a vivid connection, when, mark well, they are to be understood literally as descriptions of outwardly determinate occurrences taking place in a determinate order? Who is to judge first, the Apostles or the Ninevites or the Queen of Sheba? Not to speak of the fact that Christ himself, the Judge of all the world, sits silent on his throne and leaves the judgment to others.

These statements take on an entirely different significance when we note the particular principal point which supplies the motive in each of the great pictures. It is, as regards the last picture, the unbelief of the Pharisees that occasions Christ to a threatening warning against the hardened generation, to remind it what a terrible judgment it is going to meet. It shall in eternity be revealed how high the Ninevites, *[220]* who after all heard only one Jonas, and the Queen of the South, who after all heard only one Solomon, in reverence for the Holy, in sense of the Exalted, stand above a

generation that openly defies the truth revealed in flesh and blood. The judgment is at once inward and outward; inward, for it is the generation's own hardening by which it is judged; outward, for the example of the Ninevites and the deep longing of the Queen of the South are phenomena that furnish a measure (Cf. Matth. 11:21–24). Thus the law of selfhood is fulfilled. The judgment is in the self, in the inner life of each individual man and thereby of the generation; but this judgment in the inner life becomes the more terrible in the same degree as the death-bearing consequences of blinding and hardening unfold in the clear day of eternity, and the offence is measured with the measure of reality.

In the statement to the disciples the principal point is entirely different. It is the well-known scene with the rich young man and Christ's severe words about the sickness of riches and the rich, which occasioned Peter's question: "behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" Full compensation! is the answer. But this answer points expressly to the final catastrophe of the "regeneration", and receives life and color in the picture. Full compensation! For life, which in death lays aside only the corruptible, becomes in eternity richer, fuller, more real than any mortal can imagine, in the outward as in the inward. Full compensation for privations and sufferings, for sighs and pain, for scorn and contumely! For the pressure and burdens of finitude are essential conditions of the inwardness of under-
[221] standing, of the strength of self-development, of the life of love in faith and hope. Full compensation in power and authority, in splendor and honor! It is not a goal of self-interest, an outward reward for outward deeds, that is held out here in prospect; it is life itself, the eternal life, a gift so rich that only the true followers, the souls who on the condition of self-denial feel the law of selfhood as the law of love, have in love itself the condition for receiving the gift. The gift is inward, the gift of the spirit, life from Christ's life; but the inward takes shape in the outward. When the Christ-life unfolds its power and reveals its glory: then they shall, but also only they to whom honor is due, receive honor.

The distorted opposition between "Jewish carnality" and "Alexandrian spirituality" falls away of itself from this point of view. The life after death is, when we hold to the spirit in Christ's words, not a life of bodiless souls or natureless spirits; decisive weight is laid here on a bodiliness of a higher order, on what we can only cognize by cognizing an absolute limit for human knowledge, a supernatural nature. It is the transformation of the corruptible nature to which Christ refers in his answer to the Sadducees. It is not either the bodily or the psychical opposition of man and

woman that he wishes to efface; it is the Sadducees' objections, built upon carnal representations, that he rejects. The human self is as little a soul without a body as a body without a soul: it is in its development to fully real peculiarity a psychical-bodily being. If now the original individuality of the human being is not to be effaced but transfigured in the resurrection, then the likeness to the angels cannot possibly be understood of a fading of human individuality, an effacement of the peculiar shape of *[222]* man and woman; the passage is, as the context expressly shows, to be understood of the purity and incorruptibility in the personal eternal relation between man and woman. The angels are neither man nor woman; an angel has not flesh and blood. But Christ is man, not woman; he who was transfigured in the resurrection has flesh and blood. Flesh and blood or, as the Risen One himself has designated it, "flesh and bones", signifies in this context not sensory, corruptible elements, but the fully real human being: the congregation does not believe in a carnal resurrection, but it believes in the resurrection of the flesh.

After death — comes judgment; this is the earnestness of the whole consideration. But what is lacking in the present age is spiritual powers to awaken the earnestness of the thought of death in such a way that it becomes a really true and deep earnestness. The thundering zeal by which religious men of earnestness, penitential preachers, who on account of the tickling shudder it awakens in the awakened to hear of the outermost darkness, of the pool of hell and the lake of brimstone, when the steam stands over the devotion and the congregation is properly sulphured, can even become fashionable preachers, has not always the testimony of the Spirit. Sensible people think as follows: "if we are not angels, then neither are we devils. Time brings counsel; there is an intermediate state". Let one picture to oneself a man, one of those who, following the direction of the age in the religiously humane, have gradually prepared themselves for annihilation, waking up after death and, if we may speak so freely, poking his head into the High Hall of Eternity! — yes, he will be astonished, but *[223]* will he therefore at once be crushed as a sinner? By no means! As the humane man looks about him and catches sight of the examining judge, he makes a well-considered apology and says straight out: "I see that I have made a mistake and beg most earnestly for forgiveness". A just and humane judge cannot possibly condemn a soul that so modestly begs for forgiveness. The Catholic Church takes purgatory seriously; but it works only on an immature common people, for the doctrine of purgatory is chemically outward. The Protestant church theologians reason up and down about the intermediate state; there is an eternal damnation, and yet again it is no

eternal damnation. It is supposed to be "a dogmatic antinomy" — we have thoroughly studied the antinomy in "the Christian dogmatics" — but the antinomy is a self-made speculation; in the antinomy there is ethicizing "wit", but not religious earnestness. If it is really to become earnestness, then we must go back to the religious principle, to the principle of selfhood, and follow the law of selfhood strictly in one and all. If there is in souls a need, an essential need of an eternal life, then there must be deep grounds in the self. The possibilities of blessedness must be in there, yes! but also the possibilities of perdition; for the one conditions the other. To descend into the abysses of the self and raise the dim possibilities up to the light of day is earnestness, the earnestness of life, the earnestness of death: after death comes judgment.

R. *Nielsen.*