

## 1 Time, Moment, and Eternity - Plato, Augustine, and 2 Kierkegaard on the Theory of Time 3

4 “What we call the moment, Plato calls τὸ ἐξαίφνης [the sudden]. (...) Thus  
5 understood, the moment is not properly an atom of time but an atom of  
6 eternity. It is the first reflection of eternity in time, its first attempt, as it were,  
7 at stopping time.” (CA, p.88) These lines were written by Kierkegaard in his  
8 work, *The Concept of Anxiety*. But what do they mean? Is time fundamentally  
9 the present (Kant), or is it an infinite succession (Hegel)? The existentialist  
10 approach – whether in Sartre, Jaspers, or Heidegger – is largely based on  
11 Kierkegaard's concept of time. Without going into detail, Heidegger's  
12 conception of time (Dasein, or “being-there”) is also based on existence in  
13 the present moment: “True, Da-sein is ontically not only what is near or even  
14 nearest - we ourselves are it, each of us.” (Heidegger 1996, §.5.13.) The  
15 temporal situation of each individual raises the problem of how the totality of  
16 time and the timelessness within it affect the existential situation of the  
17 individual, and how they influence their relationship to themselves and to the  
18 outside world. This formulation of the question of time differs radically from  
19 previous conceptions (Plato, St. Augustine, Kant, Schelling, and Hegel), but  
20 Kierkegaard always defines his own position in relation to them.

21  
22 **Keywords:** existence – Kierkegaard – German Idealism – moment – eternity  
23

### 24 25 Plato and Augustine 26

27 The starting point is to decide on a question that determines the initial  
28 thinking about time. Another question is the relationship between the one (τὸ ἓν)  
29 and the many (τα πάντα), recalling Heraclitus, as well as the question of the one  
30 and the many (πολλά), namely whether this is a mutually dependent or antinomic  
31 relationship. Paul Friedländer puts it this way: the many are connected to the  
32 one, or the many and the one are separated from each other. (Friedländer 1975,  
33 p.184) This, then, is the initial question. Kierkegaard thoroughly analyses the  
34 Platonic concept described in the dialogue Parmenides. We must not forget that  
35 this is precisely a refutation of the Eleatic assumption: „One path only is left for  
36 us to speak of, namely, that (what is) is. In it are very many tokens that what is,  
37 is uncreated and indestructible, alone, complete, immovable and without end.”  
38 (Parmenides, DK 28.B8) From the perspective of Kierkegaard's theory of time,  
39 the question of whether the one changes during the transition from rest to motion  
40 is by no means irrelevant. If it does change, what does it become? What does it  
41 turn into? „What about this? Does the one seem capable of being older or  
42 younger or the same age as anything?” (Plato 140.e.) It is precisely this question  
43 that shows that the relationship between the two, which Plato expresses with the  
44 category of “transition” also raises temporal connections, on the basis of which  
45 Kierkegaard argues that Plato was forced to acknowledge the problematic nature  
46 of transition. (CA p.82, SKS IV. p. 384.)<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Kierkegaard notes that we

<sup>1</sup>And, of course, Kierkegaard here refers to Hegel: „Der er en Kategori som bestandig bruges I den Nyere

1 are given no further explanation of the nature of Hegel's transition (Übergang,  
 2 Overgangen) (ibid), which, in his view, is no accident, since it is limited  
 3 exclusively to the realm of conceptual and logical movements, and Hegel simply  
 4 refers to Aristotle without offering any particular clarification. (Aristotle 1929,  
 5 200.b.) As Kierkegaard formulates it: „In recent philosophy there is a category  
 6 that is continually used in logical no less than in historical-philosophical  
 7 inquiries. It is the category of transition.” And he adds: “However, no further  
 8 explanation is given.” (CA p.81) Yet this question, concerning the one and the  
 9 many, is just as significant for Plato as it later was for Hegel. It is therefore no  
 10 coincidence that the question of time does not arise in his logical movements. In  
 11 Plato, on the other hand, in the relationship between the one and the many, we  
 12 immediately encounter the difficulty of transition, which is caused not only by  
 13 temporality, but rather by a moment that exists in time yet stands outside time.  
 14 To be precise: what is this momentary thing that Plato calls “strange thing” or  
 15 “suddenly” (τὸ ἐξαίφνης)? “Well, in that case, is there this strange thing in  
 16 which it would then be when it changes?” What sort of thing? *The moment*.  
 17 Indeed, the moment seems to indicate something of this sort, such that there is  
 18 change from the moment to either state. For a thing does not change from resting  
 19 while still being at rest, nor does it change from moving while still being in  
 20 motion. But the moment is this strange nature, inserted between motion and rest,  
 21 existing in no time at all, and indeed to this, and from this, the moving changes  
 22 to being at rest and the resting to being in motion.” (Plato 2021, 156.e.)

23 According to Kierkegaard, this implies that Plato perceives the moment as  
 24 an atom of time, which is something “wonderful” (ἄτομος) to him. In other  
 25 words, he does not really know what to do with it and therefore cannot truly  
 26 complete his investigations.

27 The same applies to later philosophy, when it encounters against the  
 28 question of the moment. St. Augustine, for example, arrives at this concept  
 29 through a peculiar reduction of time, namely through the extension of the  
 30 dimensions of time. Augustine starts from the division of the year, through the  
 31 division of the month into days, hours, minutes, etc., to the last, indivisible unit.  
 32 “And that one hour passes away in fleeting particles. Whatever of it has flown  
 33 away is past, whatever remains is future. If any portion of time be conceived  
 34 which cannot now be divided into even the minutest particles of *moments*, this  
 35 only is that which may be called present; which, however, flies so rapidly from  
 36 future to past, that it cannot be extended by any delay. For if it be extended, it  
 37 is divided into the past and future; but the present has no space.” (St. Augustine  
 38 1957, 15.20.)

39 In other words, there is something in time that cannot be further divided,  
 40 something of the nature of ἄτομος. However, if this is true, then we only need to  
 41 answer the question: *what is the atom of?* Time? The Platonic and Augustinian  
 42 philosophies provide an answer to this, but according to Kierkegaard, they forget  
 43 the true nature of time, since they should realize that this moment contains a  
 44 peculiar contradiction. In any case, it is true—and this is why Kierkegaard holds  
 45 these interpretations of time in such high regard—that this conception

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Philosophie i logiske ikke mindre end i historisk-philosophiske Undersøgelser, det er: Overgangen.”

1 approaches the question of time from the perspective of existence, i.e., the  
 2 question of time is also the question of existence, and vice versa. (Hermann  
 3 1971, p.78) Augustine thus arrives at the moment through a reduction of time,  
 4 while Plato finds it in the transition from the one to the many. For him, the  
 5 moment is a non-existent, (Ikke-Værende). (SKS IV. p.388) According to  
 6 Kierkegaard, Plato does not go beyond this statement because the Greeks defined  
 7 temporality primarily in terms of the past rather than the future:

8 „The moment and the future in turn posit the past (Forbigangne). If Greek  
 9 life in any way denotes any qualification of time, it is past time. However, past  
 10 time is not defined in its relation to the present and the future but as a  
 11 qualification of time in general – as a passing by. Here the significance of the  
 12 Platonic “recollection” is obvious. For the Greeks, the eternal lies behind as the  
 13 past that can only be entered backwards. However, the eternal thought of as the  
 14 past is an altogether abstract concept. (SKS IV. p. 393, CA p. 89) That is why  
 15 the Greeks' relationship to eternity (the past) is nothing other than remembrance  
 16 or recollection (ἀνάμνησις), which cannot include the present moment. The  
 17 Greek conception cannot, of course, deal with the concept of eternity in the same  
 18 way, but according to Kierkegaard, this is no coincidence. The reason is that  
 19 neither Greek nor “recent philosophy” (CA p.81) knows what to do with time.  
 20 To be honest, we should note that, when it comes to the concept of eternity,  
 21 Kierkegaard does not point out here or anywhere else in his work that the Greeks  
 22 had several concepts for it. One was “Chronos” and the other was “Aion”, which,  
 23 as we know, do not mean the same thing. However, he does not distinguish  
 24 between the two.

### 25 26 27 **German idealism on time**

28  
29 From this perspective, it is important to examine the most radical  
 30 interpretation of the concept of time: Kant’s philosophy. Kant does not regard  
 31 time as a thing, a concept, or something that follows an objective course. “That  
 32 is, time is not an object, because it does not pass objectively, and not an empirical  
 33 concept that is somehow drawn from an experience, not a posteriori, but „time  
 34 is no discursive or, as one calls it, general concept, but a pure form of sensible  
 35 intuition.”(CPR p. 162) In the original text: “Die Zeit ist kein diskursiver, oder,  
 36 wie man ihn nennt, allgemeiner Begriff, sondern einer eine Form der sinnlichen  
 37 Anschauung.” (KdrV p.58) Time is an internal sense, just as space is an external  
 38 sense. This is also an important starting point for Hegel. It is very interesting that  
 39 Kant begins with an examination of space rather than an interpretation of time.  
 40 But if we look closely, his arguments are essentially (KdrV. p.50) Kant addresses  
 41 the problem of perception as a transcendental form of intuition and asserts that I  
 42 am incapable of perceiving or conceiving anything outside of time; that is, things  
 43 exist in time. The infinity of time itself means: The infinitude of time signifies  
 44 nothing more than that every determinate magnitude of time is “only possible  
 45 through limitations of a single time grounding it”. (CPR p.163) For Kant, the  
 46 concept of eternity converges with temporal infinity, as he uses the terms

1 “eternity” (Ewigkeit) and “infinity” (Unendlichkeit) in a strict sense (KdrV.  
2 p.510) In this way, Kant lays the groundwork for an argument regarding the  
3 eternal that Hegel will later use.

4 Instead, he writes: “Time is a necessary representation that grounds all  
5 intuitions. In regard to appearances in general one cannot remove time, though  
6 one can very well take the appearances away from time. Time is therefore given  
7 a priori. In it alone is all actuality of appearances possible. The latter could all  
8 disappear, but time itself, as the universal condition of their possibility, cannot  
9 be removed.” (CPR p.162) Due to inaccuracies in the translation, it’s worth  
10 checking the original text as well: “Die Zeit ist eine notwendige Vorstellung, die  
11 allen Anschauungen *zum Grunde liegt*. Man kann in Ansehung der  
12 Erscheinungen überhaupt die Zeit selbst nicht aufheben, ob man zwar ganz  
13 wohl die Erscheinungen aus der Zeit wegnehmen kann. Die Zeit ist also a priori  
14 gegeben. In ihr allein ist alle Wirklichkeit der Erscheinungen möglich.”

15 In Hegel’s philosophy, the process of absolute knowledge emerging at the  
16 level of the spirit is presented in relation to two interconnected series. The  
17 relinquishing of spirit (Entäußerung) is the first process, while the second –  
18 history – also has an idealistic aspect in relation to the first. Knowledge is “going  
19 within” (Insichgehen), in which spirit abandons its existence and surrenders its  
20 form to memory. (Hegel 1986.a. p.590., Hegel 2018. p.466)

21 “In that new shape of spirit, it likewise has to begin all over again without  
22 prejudice in its immediacy, and, from its immediacy, to rear itself again to  
23 maturity, as if all that had preceded it were lost to it and as if it were to have  
24 learned nothing from the experience of the preceding spirits. However, that  
25 inwardizing re-collection has preserved that experience; it is what is inner, and  
26 it is in fact the higher form of substance.” (ibid) In other words, cognition is the  
27 application of knowledge to the created world, the understanding and mastery of  
28 it, without which it would remain a mere dead outline. Absolute knowledge is  
29 the spirit that knows itself as spirit, which finds its own path and power in the  
30 memory of spirits, conceptually grasped history (die begriffene Geschichte), the  
31 relationship between the two processes: concept and history – “they form. the  
32 recollection and the Golgotha of absolute spirit, the actuality, the truth, the  
33 certainty of its throne, without which it would be lifeless and alone.” (Hegel  
34 1986.a. p.591) All this clearly shows that the spirit is created in time and reborn  
35 in recollection.

36 However, Kierkegaard does not deal with time in connection with the  
37 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but rather by examining Hegel's view of nature. Time  
38 and becoming are linked in Hegel in the same way. The essence of his view is  
39 that not everything arises and passes away in time – time itself is this becoming,  
40 this arising and passing away, the abstraction of being, and then he states, time  
41 itself is this becoming (Werden), this existing abstraction, the Chronos who  
42 gives birth to everything and destroys his offspring.– That which is real,  
43 however, is just as identical to as distinct from time.” (Hegel 1986.b. §.258) In  
44 agreement with Karl Löwith, we can conclude that Kierkegaard found reality in  
45 actu – as opposed to rational construction – in existence. (Löwith 1981. p.167)  
46 Therefore, the question for him from this point on is: how can finite existence

1 come into contact with the infinite, when human life is unique and irreversible,  
 2 and our understanding is imperfect and constrained by limits? The question,  
 3 then, is how a finite, mortal human being can come close to the eternal being  
 4 without becoming like God. The first man (Adam), therefore, not only commits  
 5 sin, but also postulates time, since the consequence of the first man's fall into sin  
 6 is the emergence and dominion of time; and the realization that he can never  
 7 escape death. Sin and time are interrelated concepts, and humans are bound to  
 8 both; they cannot escape either but can only—in sub rosa—hope for it. It is  
 9 possible, however, to step outside this system; this does not mean that our finite  
 10 existence becomes timeless, but rather that a connection with the timeless – with  
 11 eternity – is possible, which, however, leads us into the realm of faith.

12 What seems truly unacceptable to Kierkegaard, however, is Hegel's claim,  
 13 that the space is the abstract generality or unmediated indifference and wholly  
 14 abstract juxtaposition (nebeneinander). „The spatial presents itself as the form  
 15 of indifferent juxtaposition and quiescent subsistence; the temporal, by contrast,  
 16 presents itself as the form of unrest, of the internally negative, of successiveness,  
 17 of arising and vanishing, so that the temporal is, in that it is not, and is not, in  
 18 that it *is*.”(Hegel 1986.c. §.44 and Hegel 2010. §.448) If we view time as an  
 19 infinite process, we are faced with the problem that individual moments also  
 20 represent a process, just as the totality of moments does. Thus, there is no real  
 21 presence in it at all. For the imagination, the infinite succession of time is nothing  
 22 more than an “infinite presence without content.” (uendeligt indholdsløst  
 23 Nærværende). (SKS IV. p.389) Human being encounters a moment in time that  
 24 they cannot avoid, for even Plato says that what exists “will not, I presume, step  
 25 over the present.” (Plato 2021. 152.b.) Thus, human beings live in the present;  
 26 they cannot escape it. We could say that they cannot escape the moment. The  
 27 moment is absolute and dynamic presence, which is destroyed at the very  
 28 moment it comes into being, yet human beings can only truly live in the present.  
 29 However, the present can only be grasped by the moment, which we might define  
 30 correctly by saying: *the moment is timeless within time*. And that in itself is a  
 31 paradox.

32 A person living in time, and thus in the moment (or conversely, in the  
 33 moment, and thus in time), is therefore also connected to a moment outside of  
 34 time. The eternal also exists outside time. From one moment to the next, human  
 35 beings are guided by the leap (Spring). Thus, every moment in life is complete  
 36 in itself. The timeless (eternal) can only be touched by a *timeless moment*  
 37 *existing in time*. If time and eternity come into contact with each other, they can  
 38 only do so in time, because – in my firm opinion – there is a difference (even if  
 39 Kierkegaard does not say so explicitly) in that *eternity can appear in time, but*  
 40 *what is temporal cannot appear in the eternal*. The moment is not independent  
 41 of time, since it is contained within it, yet it is timeless, as Kierkegaard says,  
 42 referring to Plato: “in order to become acquainted with its dialectic, one should  
 43 keep in mind that the moment is non-being under the category of time.” (CA  
 44 p.82) That is, it is without extension, immeasurable, and indivisible. At the same  
 45 time, the moment is not the atom of time (*Tidens Atom*), as Plato implicitly thinks  
 46 or St. Augustine expressly states, but rather the atom of eternity (*Evighedens*

1 *Atom*) (SKS IV. pp.391-392): “it is the first reflection of eternity in time, its first  
 2 attempt, as it were, at stopping time.” (SKS IV. p.392, CA p.88) And he  
 3 describes the present and eternal as follows.: The present is the eternal, or rather,  
 4 the eternal is the present, and the present is full. In this sense the Latin said of  
 5 the deity that he is *praesens* (*praesentes dii* [the presence of the gods]) by which  
 6 expression, when used about the deity, he also signified the powerful assistance  
 7 of the deity. And what about the other one? „The eternal also signifies the present  
 8 as that which has no past and no future, and this is the perfection of the eternal.”  
 9 (SKS IV. p.390., CA p.87)

## 12 Schelling and Kierkegaard’s Perspective on Time

14 Contrary to Hegel's assertion (turned eternity into the future, a single  
 15 moment in time<sup>2</sup>) (Hegel 1986b §. 258), eternity is therefore not an indefinite  
 16 concept of the past, nor is it, as Schelling writes in one place (“what is past is  
 17 known, what is present is discerned, what is future is divined”) (Schelling 1942,  
 18 p 83, WA p.3. Gyenge 1994, p.401)<sup>3</sup>, a concept of the future that can at best be  
 19 expressed in predictions, but rather, in the fullest sense, it refers to the present.  
 20 However, temporal man is bound by the finiteness of time, Ananke's daughters  
 21 relentlessly spin the thread of his life, and Atropos impassively waits to cut it,  
 22 thus ending the torments of earthly existence. Human being lives in time,  
 23 existing outside of „eternal” time, so how can the two interact with each other?  
 24 (Cornford 1951, p. 130)

25 In this work (*Die Weltalter, Ages of the Word*), the problem of being and  
 26 time becomes strikingly inseparable. The three volumes of this work were  
 27 intended to encompass three world ages, three temporal dimensions: the past, the  
 28 present, and the future. Several versions of the first volume were completed in  
 29 1811, 1813, and 1814. Schelling emphasizes the function of time much more  
 30 forcefully than anyone else—perhaps with the exception of Kant—has done in  
 31 the history of philosophy. Everything is the work of time („*alles ist das Werk*  
 32 *der Zeit*”) (WA p.12). The properties of living and non-living things, then, derive  
 33 precisely from time: it is not that things exist in time, but that time exists in  
 34 things. Time rests without ceasing its flight for even a moment, and flies without  
 35 ever leaving its state of repose. Calm and movement at the same time. It is worth  
 36 mentioning, however, the relationship between time and eternity. The problem  
 37 of time and eternity is one of the most difficult questions to be answered in the  
 38 history of philosophy. Schelling concludes that we generally believe time to be  
 39 merely the opposite of eternity, and while it is true that they must necessarily be  
 40 understood in relation to one another, this does not mean that they are necessarily  
 41 mutually exclusive contradictions. There is one thing we can say for certain

<sup>2</sup>“Der Begriff der Ewigkeit muss aber nicht negativ so gefasst werden, als die Abstraktion von der Zeit, dass sie ausserhalb derselben gleichsam existire; ohnehin nicht in dem Sinn, als ob die Ewigkeit nach der Zeit komme; so würde die Ewigkeit zur Zukunft, einem Momente der Zeit, gemacht.”

<sup>3</sup>„Das Vergangene wird gewusst, das Gegenwärtige wird erkannt, das Zukünftige wird geahndet.”

1 about eternity: „*Ewigkeit ist ewig Ewigkeit*” – eternity is forever and ever; it can  
 2 never cease to be eternal, that is, it cannot become temporal, just as the temporal  
 3 cannot become eternal. The principle of time is therefore necessarily distinct  
 4 from eternity, but it is not entirely separate from it, since it requires time; for  
 5 eternity, in and of itself, would have no meaning. All of this also means that time  
 6 is organic; here, Schelling reaches a conclusion in his argument that is truly  
 7 remarkable in every respects. And this is nothing other than the realization that  
 8 “die ganze Zeit ist Zukunft” – in other words, that all of time is nothing other  
 9 than the future. (WA p.82) This formulation already points toward Kierkegaard’s  
 10 understanding of time, namely future-oriented time, which he explores in part in  
 11 The Concept of Anxiety and Repetition. Kierkegaard's answer: when existence  
 12 lives simultaneously in time and is simultaneously present in the moment, he  
 13 also asserts that human existence is both temporal and timeless. But of course, it  
 14 is not eternal.

15 The paradox can only be understood in a moment outside of time. The  
 16 paradox places the concept of eternity within time, and that is *moment*. „The  
 17 moment is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with  
 18 this the concept of temporality is posited, whereby time constantly intersects  
 19 eternity and eternity constantly pervades time.”(CA p.89) This very important  
 20 sentence reads as follows in the original.: “Øieblikket er hiint Tvetydige, hvori  
 21 Tiden og Evigheden berøre hinanden, og hermed er Begrebet *Timelighed* sat, hvor  
 22 Tiden bestandig afskærer Evigheden og Evigheden bestandig gennemtrænger  
 23 Tiden.” (SKS IV. p.392)

24 Kierkegaard states that this represents the synthesis of body and soul,  
 25 therefore “the synthesis of the temporal and the eternal is not another. synthesis,”  
 26 (CA p.88) that is, a new understanding of the synthesis of body and soul.  
 27 Repetition is the beauty of life, which, according to Kierkegaard, we need just  
 28 as much as a piece of bread. Repetition therefore always presupposes a practical,  
 29 active relationship, as opposed to a purely speculative approach. Speculative  
 30 philosophy, however, claims that all cognition is recollection, but it is wrong: all  
 31 of existence and thus cognition – is repetition. Remembrance suggests passivity;  
 32 instead, what is needed is an active existence based on choices. It is no  
 33 coincidence that anxiety finds its ultimate meaning in this context, for its role  
 34 which is not merely presumed to exist in the state prior to the Fall, but is given  
 35 to every single person at all times is most crucial precisely in the face of the  
 36 choice that must be made in the present moment. At the same time, this  
 37 observation also transforms the relative positions of the dimensions of time, with  
 38 the future taking on a more prominent role than the past. Repetition is linked to  
 39 the problem of temporality (*Timelighed*), so only the Spirit’s repetition is  
 40 possible, even though in time it will never be as perfect as in eternity, which is  
 41 the true repetition (SKS IV.88.)<sup>4</sup>, namely through the act of choice, insofar as the  
 42 choice itself takes place in a given situation, at a given moment; that is, it  
 43 signifies a close connection between repetition and the metaphysical leap. Man  
 44 makes his choice with anxiety, but in order to be able to choose, he must be

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<sup>4</sup>“Her er kun Aandens Gjntagelse mulig, om den end i *Timeligheden* aldrig bliver saa fuldkommen som i *Evigheden*, der er den sande Gjntagelse.”

1 conscious of what his choice entails. At the same time, even if repetition is  
 2 impossible in the world of everyday life—a fact of which Kierkegaard is  
 3 convinced by his own personal experiences (e.g., the events in Berlin, or let’s  
 4 think about the play at the Königstädter Theater) (SKS pp IV.45-46) – this does  
 5 not in any way mean that repetition cannot occur or is not a reality in another  
 6 sphere. An excellent example of this is Job and the lessons to be learned from  
 7 his life. The *temporal* form of repetition is not perfect, so this expression is not  
 8 possible in the true sense of the word. For those who believe in repetition, the  
 9 opportunity it offers can also become a reality; in Job’s life, this means that,  
 10 through the present moment, individual existence can come into contact with the  
 11 eternal. This is what the person of Christ signifies: he is both mediator and co-  
 12 existent with all that has ever been. If, in the act of remembrance, the direction  
 13 of movement is backward, then through moving forward, through repetition –  
 14 one reaches the eternal.

15 In Danish, the term “to repeat” (*gentage*) inherently implies, on the one  
 16 hand, an active behavior, as it simultaneously means bringing something back  
 17 or regaining it something that is possible only through the active involvement of  
 18 the person performing the action. In addition, it also encompasses an event  
 19 insofar as the event itself takes place. The same dichotomy can be observed in it  
 20 as in its German counterpart (*Wiederholung, wieder-holen*), a distinction that the  
 21 German word further emphasizes when used as a verb, since the meaning differs  
 22 depending on whether the separable or non-separable form is used. According  
 23 to Victor Guarda, the dual function of repetition is thus inherent in the expression  
 24 itself, only it is directed not backward but forward. For true repetition does not  
 25 become a reality in the everyday world, but in the future as mediated by faith.  
 26 “Is there not, then, a repetition? Did I not get everything double? Did I not get  
 27 myself again and precisely in such a way that I might have a double sense of its  
 28 meaning? Compared with such a repetition, what is a repetition of worldly  
 29 possessions, which is indifferent toward the qualification of the spirit? Only his  
 30 children did Job not receive double again, for a human life cannot be redoubled  
 31 that way. Here only repetition of the spirit is possible, even though it is never so  
 32 perfect in time as in eternity, which is the true repetition.” (Kierkegaard 1983  
 33 p.220)

34 Job’s wealth doubled compared to what he had lost, but he did not get his  
 35 children back; in other words, there is no perfect restoration in this life. Although  
 36 everything can be attained in this world of earthly pleasures, if a man is not  
 37 careful, he stands to lose something far more precious than any material gain and  
 38 if he succumbs to despair, he loses himself. The young man in *Repetition*,  
 39 however, who had lost everything in the material world, regained something he  
 40 had never truly possessed – something whose loss we find so difficult to fathom  
 41 – and which is now truly his: himself. If he were to fall into despair, this could  
 42 never have happened to him, and this shows that the matter must be taken  
 43 entirely seriously; it cannot be treated lightly, for despair is, above all else,  
 44 dangerous—a terrible, deadly disease. Kierkegaard, however, will elaborate on  
 45 this in another, later work (*The Sickness unto Death, Sygdommen til Døden*) (see  
 46 SKS XI).  
 47

## 1 Conclusion

2  
3 „When the Greeks said that all knowing is recollecting, they said that all  
4 existence, which is, has been; when one says that life is a repetition, one says:  
5 actuality, which has been, now comes into existence. If one does not have the  
6 category of recollection or of repetition, all life dissolves into an empty,  
7 meaningless noise. Recollection is the ethnical [ethnische] view of life, repetition  
8 the modern; repetition is the interest [Interesse] of metaphysics, and also the  
9 interest upon which metaphysics comes to grief; repetition is the watchword  
10 [Løsnet] in every ethical view; repetition is *conditio sine qua non* [the  
11 indispensable condition] for every issue of dogmatics.” (Kierkegaard 1983, p.  
12 149, SKS III. pp. 25-26)

13 Augustine's famous question, “What was God doing before that [before  
14 creation]?” (Augustine 1957. XI.10) thus receives a seemingly strange answer  
15 here. Augustine is right: the question is “meaningless”, because there was no  
16 time *before* creation, so time began *with* creation. Kierkegaard's answer,  
17 however, is different. Time did not begin with creation, but *with the Fall*,  
18 because before that there was no time in Eden – no history, no personality, no  
19 generational succession. Thus, time is the most personal, most intimate  
20 characteristic of human being – one that can never be fully understood.

21 Of course, it can be said that without the fundamental principles of Plato  
22 and Aristotle, Kierkegaard, who was very familiar with Greek philosophy thanks  
23 to his excellent teacher, Poul Martin Møller (at one point, there was even talk of  
24 him getting a position at the university), would have gotten nowhere. However,  
25 his rejection of the Kantian and Hegelian conception of time can be interpreted  
26 from a specific existentialist standpoint, i.e., while he rejects the interpretation  
27 of German idealism, he further develops the Augustinian view and makes no  
28 secret of this. But most importantly, it is he who, building on Plato, states that  
29 the question of time is also a question of existence, and not Martin Heidegger,  
30 who conceals the influence of Kierkegaard.

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