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Becoming Through Repetition:
Kierkegaard's Conception of Self-Becoming

by

Asgeir Theodor Johannesson

Thesis for the degree of Ph.D. in Philosophy

Supervisor: Professor Dr. Genia Schönbaumsfeld

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I, Asgeir Theodor Johannesson, declare that this Ph.D. thesis, *Becoming Through Repetition: Kierkegaard's Conception of Self-Becoming*, and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

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Abstract of Thesis

FACULTY OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES

Philosophy

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

BECOMING THROUGH REPETITION: KIERKEGAARD'S CONCEPTION OF SELF-BECOMING

by Asgeir Theodor Johannesson

The meaning of Kierkegaard's concept of self-becoming is not obvious and it fundamentally depends on how one approaches his body of work and how one understands his vocation and creative impulse as a philosopher. There is strong evidence for a non-teleological reading of him, according to which his creative impulse is to be found in his category of repetition. However, this requires a refutation of the reliability of his autobiographical narrative from 1848. An explanation of Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming requires an analysis of his notion of the self, as well as his notion of the process of becoming. Language acquisition marks the beginning of selfhood. The self can be viewed in context of a struggle between the first self-element and the deeper one, which can be compared to the tension between the ego and the superego in the structural model of Freud. The self can also be viewed in a way in which one's self-determining agency constitutes and upholds a synthesis between sets of opposites, where psychical factors are on one side and the physical factors are on the other side. The agency gradually actualises possibilities and makes ideals concrete, by the so-called movements of infinitude and finitude, in which an imagined possibility is chosen and brought in line with necessity. The self is forged through the subjective repetition involved in the process, both its inwardness and its character. The process of becoming is a process of change, where new qualities come into existence through freedom, in contrast to qualities that merely unfold in an organic or logical way. An anxiety and pathos motivate the task of becoming. The framework of the existence-spheres is a venue of becoming, but it should not be understood as a teleological system of subjectivity. An existence-sphere is a horizon of meaning, linked to the struggle between the self-elements. They can be compared to a form of life, and the transitions between them can be compared to an aspect-dawning. In addition

to the everyday repetition involved in actualisation of possibilities, there is a transformative repetition which signifies an advancement of the self-determining agency and which can be associated with an openness to the abyssal ground of freedom. Moreover, the paradigm of repetition is aligned with the concept of self-becoming, including a time-consciousness where the focus is on the present while the orientation is towards the future, pressing forward, in contrast to the mentality of recollection. This time-consciousness makes one properly attuned to temporal existence and is part of the process of becoming in its thick sense. Self-becoming terminates in death. Immortality is to be understood as judgment and to think about death in earnest generates the time-consciousness of repetition.

Acknowledgements

The idea of writing a Ph.D. thesis on Kierkegaard came to me after reading *Works of Love*. My original intention was to analyse the allusions made to Socrates and Platonic *erōs* in the book, inspired by George Pattison's foreword. However, the project gradually developed into a thesis on Kierkegaard's concept of self-becoming—and after the final editing of the work, almost nothing remains of the original piece.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Jóhannes Ásgeirsson and Kolbrún K. Karlsdóttir. Their steadfast support has made all the difference.

Moreover, I offer my special thanks to professor Dr. Genia Schönbaumsfeld, who has been inspiring and helpful in every regard.

Note on Referencing

As a general rule, the Harvard referencing style is used for all references to texts by Søren Kierkegaard (see the list of abbreviations below).

The Chicago Notes and Bibliography (NB) referencing style is strictly followed for all other referencing, including references to texts by the editors of Kierkegaard's works, such as an editorial introduction to his works and editorial endnotes. The only minor deviation from the Chicago NB style is that, when suitable, the year of the *original* publication of a work is shown after the publication year of the edition we use, separated by '/', as in the following:

> Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. James Strachey (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1960/1923), 25.

In this example, 1960 is the publication year of the edition we use, while 1923 is the year the work was originally published. In line with both the Chicago NB style and the Harvard style), abbreviations for 'page' ('p.') and 'pages' ('pp.') are omitted, except in instances where they are needed for the sake of clarity.

The first time a work is mentioned in the dissertation a footnote will provide full information on the work, no matter whether the work is by Kierkegaard (following the Harvard format) or by another author (following the Chicago NB format).

When a work not by Kierkegaard (and thus following the Chicago NB format), is mentioned a second time, the footnote will only state the author's last name and the name of the work (a short version of it if appropriate), followed by the page number.

All works are listed in the bibliography at the end, divided into three categories: (1) works by Kierkegaard; (2) books not by Kierkegaard; and (3) papers and chapters.
Abbreviation will consistently be used for the following publishers:

(1) Cambridge University Press: CUP.
(2) Oxford University Press: OUP.
(3) Princeton University Press: PUP.

All issues regarding punctuation, for example the location of quotation marks in relation to periods and commas and the format of quotations within quotations, will strictly follow the Chicago NB guidelines as provided in the 17th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*.*

In writing the Danish terms I will follow Kierkegaard's capitalisation of nouns, which is in line with German orthography, while capitalisation of nouns in modern Danish is in line with English orthography.

* *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

List of Abbreviations

Works by Søren Kierkegaard*

BA	*The Book on Adler*	(PM)
CA	*The Concept of Anxiety*	(VH)
CCLA	*The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*	(IeI)
CD	*Christian Discourses*	(SK)
CI	*The Concept of Irony*	(SK)
COR	*The Corsair Affair*	(SK)
CUP-I	*Concluding Unscientific Postscript, volume I*	(JC)
CUP-II	*Concluding Unscientific Postscript, volume 2*	(JC)
DO	*Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*	(JC)
EO-I	*Either/Or, part I*	(VE/A)
EO-II	*Either/Or, part II*	(VE/B)
EPW	*Early Polemical Writings*	(SK)
EUD	*Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*	(SK)
FPOSL	*From the Papers of One Still Living*	(SK)
FSE	*For Self-Examination*	(SK)
FT	*Fear and Trembling*	(JdS)
JFY	*Judge for Yourself*	(SK)
LD	*Letters and Documents*	(SK)
M	*The Moment*	(SK)
P	*Prefaces*	(SK)
PC	*Practice in Christianity*	(A-C)
PCS	*Phister as Captain Scipio*	(P)
PF	*Philosophical Fragments*	(JC)
PV	*The Point of View*	(SK)
R	*Repetition*	(CC)
SLW	*Stages on Life's Way*	(HB)
SUD	*The Sickness unto Death*	(A-C)
TA	*Two Ages*	(SK)
TDIO	*Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*	(SK)
UDVS	*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*	(SK)
WA	*Without Authority*	(K & HH)
WL	*Works of Love*	(K)
WS	*Writing Sampler*	(SK)

* The Princeton University Press series of 27 volumes will be used to refer to Kierkegaard's writings, unless it is explicitly stated in the text and/or in a footnote that other translations are being used (see additional abbreviations on the next page, where the translators are in brackets; see also the bibliography for more information). The editors and translators of 23 of the 27 volumes in the Princeton series are Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. The remaining four volumes are *Letters and Documents* (LD), ed. and trans. Henrik Rosenmeier; *The Concept of Anxiety* (CA), ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte and Albert B. Anderson; *Early Polemical Writings* (EPW), ed. and trans. Julia Watkin; and *Prefaces* / *Writing Sampler* (P), ed. and trans. Todd W. Nichol. For journal entries that are not included in the Princeton series, we'll use the seven volume *Journals and Papers* (JP), ed. and trans. Howard & Edna Hong (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1967–78). Prominent works will be referred to separately in spite of being combined in a single volume in the Princeton series.—SK=Søren Kierkegaard (not written under pseudonym); IeI=Inter et Inter (pseudonym); MM=Petrus Minor; VH=Vigilius Haufniensis; JC=Johannes Climacus (pseudonym); VE/A=Victor Eremita (editor) & "A" (author); VE/B=Victor Eremita (editor) & "B," a.k.a. Judge William (author); JdS=Johannes de Silentio (pseudonym); A-C=Anti-Climacus (pseudonym); P=Phister (pseudonym); CC=Constantine Constantius (pseudonym); HB=Hilarius Bookbinder (pseudonym).

CA-L	*The Concept of Dread [Anxiety]* (Lowrie)	(VH)
CUP-H	*Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Hannay)	(JC)
EO-H	*Either/Or* (Hannay).	(SK)
JP	*Journals and Papers*	(SK)
Pap.	*Papirer* (in Danish)	(SK)
R-L	*Repetition* (Lowrie)	(SK)
R-P	*Repetition* (Piety)	(SK)
WL-P	*Works of Love* (Pattison, ed.)	(SK)

Introduction

> Kierkegaard understood the desire of metaphysics to arrest the play, and he took faith to be the great transgression of metaphysics, the frustration of that desire, flushing out its ruses, cutting off its escape routes, forcing it to face the flux.
>
> —John D. Caputo[1]

Life is dynamic rather than static, which is the reason it is often compared to a stream. It is widely recognised that the dynamic quality applies to mental aspects of human beings, including their subjective agency and character. Accordingly, the human subject is not entirely fixed in its constitution and identity, but rather—at least to some extent—in a constant flux of change. In the most basic sense, the concept of self-becoming refers to such a subjective development and character-formation. A more complex meaning of the concept, however, contains all sorts of facts and insights about the process in question: its nature, limitations, goals, et cetera. The concept is essential to the philosophy of the influential 19th century Danish author Søren Kierkegaard.[2] The notion of becoming features prominently in two of his major works: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*[3] by the pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus, and subsequently in *The Sickness unto Death*[4] by the pseudonym Anti-Climacus. In both works it is often formulated as "the process of becoming" and in the latter work a version of the formulation "to become oneself" is also used in a few passages. Moreover, an important light is cast on the concept of self-becoming in many other works by Kierkegaard, although the exact term may not be used. The reason is simple: frequent observations in connection to subjective development apply to the related notion of self-becoming and affect its meaning. Many of Kierkegaard's most prominent works are valuable for an interpretation of the concept of self-becoming in such a roundabout

1 John D. Caputo, "Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and the Foundering of Metaphysics," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Vol. 6: Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, ed. Robert L Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 224.

2 Søren Aabye Kierkegaard was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, on May 5, 1813, and he died in the same city on November 11, 1855. He graduated from the University of Copenhagen in 1840 with a master´s degree in theology, although his studies covered other fields, including philosophy. He created a name for himself as an author with the publication of *Either/Or* in 1843 and he continued to be a prolific writer until his fatal sickness roughly 12 years later.

3 *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, vol. I (CUP-I), trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1992); *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, vol. II (CUP-II), trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1992). Hereafter: *Postscript*.

4 *The Sickness unto Death* (SUD), trans. Howard and Enda Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1985). Hereafter: *Sickness*.

manner, including *Either/Or*,[5] *Repetition*,[6] *Fear and Trembling*,[7] *Philosophical Fragments*,[8] *The Concept of Anxiety*,[9] and *Two Ages*.[10] Therefore, an adequate conceptual analysis in relation to self-becoming cannot be grounded solely on works such as *Postscript* and *Sickness*, but must engage with a large portion of Kierkegaard's authorship, if not his entire corpus.

In this thesis, *Becoming Through Repetition*, I will analyse Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming. My task is first and foremost an exegetical endeavour—with the aim of casting light on a crucial aspect of his conceptual framework. As the title suggests, my thesis is linked to Kierkegaard's category of repetition: my claim is that the process of self-becoming is essentially the practice of repetition, in his sense of the term, so that one's self is forged through repetition. Such a description of the concept of self-becoming is novel in scholarship, although there is secondary literature that points in that direction, to which I will draw attention. An important part of my conceptual analysis is of course to focus on the two terms that constitute the composite term of self-becoming, namely Kierkegaard's concept of the self and his concept of becoming. My accounts of these concepts, which will include original observations and insights, will naturally be the main building blocks of my construction of self-becoming. The cornerstone of the exegetical task, however, is an explanation and defence of my interpretive approach to Kierkegaard, for which I choose the designation "moderate theatrical reading." My analysis of the concept of self-becoming includes criticism and rejection of both teleological and narrativist approaches to the subject matter.

An example of an opaque piece of text that will become transparent in the course of my analysis is the following intriguing passage of *Sickness*—which I will discuss in chapter two: "The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself[.] . . . To become oneself is to become concrete. . . . [T]he progress of the becoming must be an infinite moving away from itself in the infinitizing of the self, and an infinite coming back to itself in the finitizing process" (SUD 29–30).[11] There is a lot to unpack in these lines. In what way is the self a synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates itself to itself? How can it be the task of a self to become itself? What is meant

5 *Either/Or,* part I (EO-I) trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1987); *Either/Or,* part II (EO-II), trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1987).

6 *Repetition* (R) trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1983). *Fear and Trembling* is published in the same volume as *Repetition* in the Princeton series, but the works will still be referred to separately.

7 *Fear and Trembling* (FT) trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1983).

8 *Philosophical Fragments* (PF), trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1985). Hereafter: *Fragments*. The posthumously published *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est* is included in the same Princeton volume.

9 *The Concept of Anxiety* (CA), trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1983).

10 *Two Ages* (TA), trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1978).

11 See §2.3.3.

by becoming concrete? These are a few of many questions that are likely to immediately spring to mind—and the answers to all of them depend on an adequate understanding of the concept of self-becoming. However, even if one establishes the meaning of the passage, one is left with the daunting task of determining to what extent the views of Anti-Climacus can be attributed to Kierkegaard, as I will address.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. In chapter one, "Magic of the Theatre," I will lay the cornerstone for the rest of my analysis by articulating and defending my reading of Kierkegaard. The activity of interpreting texts is not an exact science, but I will naturally seek to adopt as reasonable a procedure as possible. In the first section, I will prepare the ground by providing an overview of exegetical strategies in scholarship on Kierkegaard, before accounting for my interpretive strategy, which is a combination of what has in scholarship been labelled as a "moderate reading," on the one hand, and reading which can be referred to as "staged," "dramatic," or "theatrical," on the other hand.[12] In the second section, I will defend my reading by assessing two authorial testimonies by Kierkegaard, namely the explanation appended to *Postscript* and the autobiographical narrative of the *Point of View* testimony.[13] I will criticise and reject the *Point of View* testimonial reading. The analysis of the testimonies casts further light on my moderate theatrical reading, upholds it against competing alternatives, and prepares the ground for the third section of the chapter, in which I account for Kierkegaard's essential vocation and identify his philosophical core, or "creative impulse," as I choose to call it, namely his defining feature as a philosopher. I will argue that his essential vocation is that of a poet-philosopher and that his creative impulse is to be found negatively in opposition to Hegelian mediation and positively in the category of repetition, which is introduced at that point.

In chapter two, "The Kierkegaardian Self," I will account for Kierkegaard's concept of self-hood. In the first section, I will set the stage by explaining his philosophical anthropology in relation to the human condition before and after the emergence of language. I will begin by explaining his notion of immediacy and how it is interrupted by people's linguistic capacity; and then I will address his notion of anxiety in a context that is relevant for my task. In the next section, I will turn to Kierkegaard's perspective on the self; first by discussing his scheme of the "first self" and the "deeper self," as well as making necessary conceptual

12 As I will discuss in chapter one, the moderate reading was introduced by Genia Schönbaumsfeld in her *A Confusion of the Spheres: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), while the theatrical reading can be attributed to multiple scholars, to various extents.

13 *Point of View* (PV), trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1998).

clarifications. Subsequently, I will compare the scheme to Sigmund Freud's structural model, which turns out to be an illuminating context. In the final section, I will enter the crux of the chapter by analysing Kierkegaard's relational depiction of selfhood, which is expressed in *Sickness,* but which is also implicitly relied on in *Postscript*. I will explain the relational model as an existential topography, in which the human spirit constitutes and upholds a synthesis between psychical and physical factors. Crucial to the topography are four "in between" features which I will explain: concreteness between finitude and infinitude, self-consciousness between reality and ideality, freedom between necessity and possibility, and the instant between time and eternity. Finally, I will conclude the chapter by explaining how the self is achieved by decisions and resolve.

In chapter three, "Abyss of Becoming," I will turn the focus to the latter half of the composite term of self-becoming, namely the "becoming" aspect. Kierkegaard's concept of becoming signifies change, as I will address in the first section, and it is best explained in the context of Aristotle and Hegel, in which Kierkegaard employs the former's notion of *kinēsis* against the pseudo-change that he perceives in the latter's philosophy of becoming. In the second section I will explain the role of pathos and despair in the process of becoming. Both pathos and despair can be described as kinds of suffering, but pathos is also a motivational impetus in the task of becoming, while despair is fundamentally a misrelation in selfhood, as I will explain. In the third section, I will turn to Kierkegaard's framework of the existence-spheres, which can be regarded as the venue of self-becoming. I will begin my account by discussing a binary distinction between an aesthetic mode of living, on the one hand, and an ethical-religious mode of living, on the other hand. I will present them as different paths in the process of becoming, each with its own end-goal and mastery. Then, I will cast further light on the existence-spheres by putting them in the context of the Wittgensteinian notion of "forms of life," as well as explaining transitions between spheres as "aspect-dawning." Next, I will argue for an interpretation of the existence-spheres, according to which they are non-teleological categories of life-views in contrast to viewing them as teleological stages. Then, I will bring the chapter to an end by addressing the notion of *Afgrund*, or what I refer to as the abyssal ground of freedom. I associate this ground with an important aspect of the concept of self-becoming, across the existence spheres, as I will explain.

The fourth and final chapter—before I reach my conclusion—is "Repetition unto Death," which is the culmination of the thesis, where my previous discussion will be linked to the category of repetition. The main section of the chapter consists of two important subsections.

In the former one, I will account for Kierkegaard's concept of repetition and explain it as a new paradigm of thought; while in the latter one, I will account for the different ways in which one becomes a self through repetition. Finally, I will conclude the chapter with a brief section on the termination of the process of self-becoming. I will argue that the event of death marks the end of the process in Kierkegaard's scheme of things. Moreover, to think about death in earnest, according to him, teaches one how to live. "No thinker grasps life as death does," as he stresses in *Works of Love*: "this masterful thinker who is able not only to think through every illusion but is able to think it to pieces, think it to nothing. If, then, you are bewildered as you consider the multiple paths of life, then go out to the dead, 'where all paths meet'—then a full view is easy" (WL 345).[14] I end with death, but I begin with the magic of the theatre, to which I will now turn.

[14] *Works of Love* (WL), trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1995).

Chapter 1 Magic of the Theatre

> I have had too much to do with the ethical to be a poet, but I am too much of poet to be a truth-witness; I am a *confinium* [border territory] in between. I am, to allude to the highest, neither the one awaited nor the forerunner of the one awaited, but a prescient figure who with categorical exactitude has been related to the future of history, to the turn that should be made and that will become the future of history.
>
> —Søren Kierkegaard (PV 278)[15]

1.1 Ways of reading Kierkegaard

1.1.1 Overview of exegetical possibilities

How does one determine the philosophical ideas of an author who employs many layers of pseudonymity, as well as a range of literary devices and a broad spectrum of styles? Furthermore, how can one be certain that the author in question had any real philosophy to discern? These questions are likely to enter the mind of anyone who seeks to engage seriously with Kierkegaard as a philosopher and I will begin to address them by introducing the diverse landscape of interpretive positions.

In an introduction to a recent collection, Joseph Westfall provides a useful summary of the methods scholars have used in their reading of Kierkegaard.[16] Westfall's broad grouping of interpretive standpoints consists of four basic categories, which can in turn be divided into multiple subcategories. The first basic category consists of readers who "ignore questions of authorship—including authorial identity and intent, genre, style, and so on—such that Kierkegaard is taken to mean whatever literally is said on the page of any of the books ultimately ascribable to him."[17] In other words, pseudonymity and literary devices are not taken into account, with the result that Kierkegaard is turned into a normal propositional philosopher, so that he is read as one would, for instance, read Kant or Russell.[18] In naming this category, I will follow the designation of Genia Schönbaumsfeld who in her *Confusion of the Spheres* has referred to it as the "literal-minded reading."[19]

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15 Supplement to PV; from draft of "Three Notes" (*Pap.* IX B 64 *n.d.*, 1848). I'll address the statement in §1.3 below.

16 Joseph Westfall, "Introduction: On Kierkegaard's Work as an Author," in *Authorship and Authority in Kierkegaard's Writings*, ed. Joseph Westfall (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). 1–25.

17 Ibid., 8.

18 Ibid., 7. Westfall maintains that Martin Buber, Theodor Adorno, Albert Camus, Jacques Derrida, and Alastair MacIntyre approach Kierkegaard in this way, at least occasionally.

19 Genia Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 5.

The second basic category consists of readers "for whom Kierkegaard is not really saying anything in his writings," at least not in his pseudonymous works, either in light of "the nature of language itself," which is considered to prevent "such texts from amounting to anything more than nonsense," or because of an absolute rupture between the author and his pseudonyms, so that the writings cannot be associated with Kierkegaard and cannot represent his ideas.[20] James Conant is mentioned as the prime example regarding the former perspective, while Roger Pool receives that lot in relation to the latter.[21] Conant's central position, which is grounded in his interpretation of *Postscript*, is that Kierkegaard is engaged in indirectly "exposing the incoherence" of any "doctrine of ineffable truth" by first pushing readers into a deceptive illusion of a "pseudo-doctrine" and then revoking it at the end of the book, in a plot to undo their "attraction to various grammatically well-formed strings of words that resonate with an aura of sense."[22] Conant argues that "the silence we are left with is not the pregnant silence that comes with a censorious posture of guarding the sanctity of the ineffable," but rather the silence we are left with when nonsense has been unmasked.[23] Thus, the Dane is supposed to be engaged in stating nonsense in order to indirectly delineate the disparity between sense and nonsense.[24] Conant also adheres to the view that Westfall associates with the "open reading" of Poole, namely that an absolute distinction must be made between Kierkegaard and his pseudonymous authors, so that it is not even coherent to speak of his pseudonymous authorship and ideas except as an impenetrable mystery.[25] The result of such an outcome can be to identify Kierkegaard solely with his signed works, which would significantly narrow the scope of his thought, or his own signature can alternatively be regarded as yet another pseudonym, so that the link between the author and his whole body of work is broken. A closely-related position consists of the view that Kierkegaard's literary style prevents his works from being taken seriously as philosophical texts, which is probably the main reason he has often been treated with scepticism in philosophy departments. The label I will adopt for this grouping of interpretive standpoints is also borrowed from Schönbaumsfeld: "purely literary reading."

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20 Westfall, "On Kierkegaard's Work as an Author," 8.

21 Ibid., 10–11.

22 James Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense," in *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 196 and 216.

23 Ibid., 216.

24 Conant's reading of *Postscript* is in line with his controversial interpretation of *Tractatus* by Wittgenstein.

25 Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 1. See also Westfall, "On Kierkegaard's Work as an Author," 10–11 and 21.

The literal-minded reading and the purely literary reading are inversely related in the sense that the more one views Kierkegaard as a propositional philosopher the less one views him as a prose poet, and vice versa. These positions are probably best understood as pure criteria. That is to say, very few readers of Kierkegaard—in any case among scholars—belong wholly to these categories; rather their interpretive strategies can resemble them to a certain degree. Such reservation applies, for example, to most, if not all, of the philosophers that Westfall associates with instances of literal-minded reading.[26] It is safe to say that both categories are normally used in a derogatory manner, as excesses to avoid, and rarely would anyone voluntarily subscribe to them. They are like spots on a nautical chart that it would be regarded as sensible to navigate between in order not to run ashore. Schönbaumsfeld points towards this middle-ground position by comparing the categories to each other. The only positive aspect she grants to the literal-minded reading is the counterbalance it provides to a purely literary reading: "it takes Kierkegaard seriously, in one sense at least, as a thinker—that is, as someone who did actually have some views to report."[27] However, such reading fails to take him "seriously enough," by ignoring the meaning of the literary aspects of his writings and by avoiding authorial issues.[28] In addition to the importance of considering pseudonymity, she stresses the importance of considering Kierkegaard's decisions on publication, that is to say, decisions about whether works ought to be published or not. In turn, what she mentions as advantageous to the purely literary reading is that the "strongly literary dimension" of Kierkegaard's writings is at least noticed and taken into account, while it "flattens his *oeuvre* out every bit as crassly as the literal-minded reading does," and at the same time reduces its value "to a pointless—indeed a thoughtless—one-joke wonder."[29] Westfall agrees with Schönbaumsfeld's negative assessment of the two basic categories and he refers to them collectively as the "two extremes."[30] He is more explicit in his criticism of the literal-minded reading, of which he says that by ignoring or denying "the significance of the polyvocality and multiplicity of styles for interpretation," it treats the author "like a schoolmaster communicating his truths more or less directly to his pupils"—and he is certain that Kierkegaard was "no author of textbooks."[31] Westfall's point is that

26 Adorno's position is e.g. nuanced enough to avert from being listed as literal-minded, not least regarding pseudonymity: scholars must, according to him, "confront the abstract figures of the pseudonyms as a group with the concrete motives encompassed by the framework of pseudonymity and to determine the coherence of the organization accordingly." *Kierkegaard's Construction of the Aesthetic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989/1962), 11.

27 Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres*, 5.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Westfall, "On Kierkegaard's Work as an Author," 8.

31 Ibid., 7.

Kierkegaard's way of communication is to a large extent indirect, while reading him as a philosopher of propositions is to assume his communication to be direct. According to Conant's purely literary reading, however, works like *Postscript* are not meant to mean anything except to indirectly make one colossal point according to which all communication of the ineffable is rejected as fundamentally nonsensical. Conant builds his argument to a large extent on Climacus's revocation at the end of *Postscript*, which he likens to Wittgenstein's revocation of *Tractatus* at the end of that work. However, as Schönbaumsfeld argues, Climacus is most likely not revoking *Postscript* as nonsense, but rather distinguishing the work from speculative philosophy, to demonstrate "that conceptual clarification about what Christianity is cannot turn one into a Christian." [32] Moreover, Schönbaumsfeld points out that the revocation is made in the context of a remark about the traditional Roman Catholic practice of avoiding censorship by inserting a proclamation at the end of books that everything in them is in accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church. The revocation can thus be plausibly understood as a humorous version of such a proclamation: "Climacus is ironically hedging his bets against attacks by the Danish Church," as Schönbaumsfeld puts it.[33] Such an interpretation would be in line with a journal entry where Kierkegaard maintains that "with Climacus everything drowns in humour; therefore he himself revokes his book" (SUD 140).[34] According to Schönbaumsfeld, Climacus is engaging in direct "conceptual elucidations of the nature of Christianity,"[35] as well as indirectly stimulating the "ethical transformation" of his readers.[36] As Conant's position is based on a probable misinterpretation of Climacus's revocation in *Postscript*, Poole's variety of the purely literary reading, according to which the link is cut between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, is grounded on a questionable interpretation of Kierkegaard's authorial explanation appended to *Postscript*, as I will later address.[37]

Westfall's third basic category is centred on Kierkegaard's main authorial testimony, namely the one contained in the autobiographical writings from 1848, the most substantial of which is *The Point of View for my Work as an author*. Kierkegaard decided not to publish it except

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32 Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres*, 137.

33 Ibid.

34 JP VI 6439 (*Pap*. X[1] A 530). However, it would be mistaken to assume that Climacus's pointed humour drains his writings of valuable content.

35 Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres*, 135.

36 Ibid., 155. It is beyond the scope of this overview to explore Conant's reading further, but I will introduce Kierkegaard's concept of the self by discussing his ideas on language in section 2.1, and in line with Schönbaumsfeld's view that Wittgenstein's later philosophy is a better match for the Dane than *Tractatus*, I will illuminate the framework of the existence-spheres by putting it in context with forms of life in §3.3.2.

37 See §1.2.1.

in a much-abridged redaction in 1851 under the title *On My Work as an Author*. The writings were collected into *The Point of View* volume of the Princeton series, which I will refer to as the *Point of View* writings. In his delimitation of this category, Westfall has first and foremost in mind readers who ground their interpretation on these writings from 1848, in which the pseudonymous works are described as deceptive in nature and only intended to indirectly lead people to Christianity. I will designate this approach to interpreting Kierkegaard as the "*Point of View* testimonial reading." The list of notable scholars who adhere to *Point of View* testimonial strategy includes Walter Lowrie, Niels-Jørgen Cappelørn, Michael Theunissen, Wilfred Greve, and Julia Watkin. The contemporary consensus, however, leans towards scepticism of the *Point of View* testimony—and I will entrench that consensus by casting doubt on its reliability.[38]

Westfall's fourth and final category is a mixed grouping of various exegetical positions, according to which the self-interpretation of the *Point of View* testimony is not regarded as reliable evidence, so that understanding of the authorship rests substantially upon "aspects or elements" that are regarded as fundamental. Westfall makes an indicative list of six such types: Socratic or maieutic, moderate or philosophical, poetic, deceptive, deconstructive, and staged or dramatic.[39] Such a list can be made either shorter or much longer, depending on how narrowly the categories are construed. In my subsequent account I diverge from Westfall's description and compress the list to three essential positions that have gained traction: the maieutic, the moderate, and the theatrical.

The maieutic reading consists in viewing Kierkegaard fundamentally as a practitioner of Socratic *maieutics* or midwifery. It is grounded in a reconstruction of the historical Socrates that is both plausible and attractive. Socrates compared his activity to the art of a midwife, because he claims to symbolically help his interlocutors to give birth to a new state of consciousness.[40] Thus, Socrates sought to ethically transform people, rather than informing them about objective facts or putting forward speculative theories. In fact, Socrates, according to this view, had no theories to teach. Such reconstruction of the historical Socrates is primarily based on Plato's early dialogues, while the more dogmatic Socrates of the later dialogues is seen as a literary figure that Plato creates as a mouthpiece for his own views. According to the maieutic interpretation, Kierkegaard's activity as an author is analogous to the historical

38 See 1.2.2. Those who e.g. value the appendix to *Postscript* most among the authorial testimonies are likely to adopt another interpretive strategy (see §1.2.1).

39 Westfall, "On Kierkegaard's Work as an Author," 8–9 and 12–22.

40 See e.g. Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. John McDowell (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 109–110.

Socrates. The French philosopher Pierre Hadot has pioneered the maieutic reading through influential works.[41] Advocates of the maieutic reading are normally immersed in the authorship of Johannes Climacus, *Fragments* and *Postscript*, although also relying on other published works, such as parts of *Either/Or* and *The Concept of Irony*.[42] There are also textual sources in posthumously published material, most significantly an essay from 1855, titled "My Task," that belongs to a draft of issue ten of his serial *The Moment*.[43] In the essay he calls Socrates his "only analogy" and describes his task as the "Socratic task" of auditing "the definition of what it is to be a Christian" (M 341). The maieutic reading has the advantage of drawing much attention to subjectivity, inwardness, and indirect communication, which are important aspects of Kierkegaard's thought.[44] However, my verdict, in short, is that the reading is too one-dimensional and thus insufficient as an exegetical strategy; it can easily lead to a type of a quietist interpretation, according to which no ideas can be attributed to the Dane, so that the philosophical substratum in his works is not recognised.[45]

The moderate reading, which is articulated by Schönbaumsfeld, is grounded in positions and principles that are accepted by many scholars of Kierkegaard. Its status in Westfall's mixed category can be disputed, because it is not based on an element that is regarded as fundamental to the authorship, as should apply to standpoints in that category according to the description. Perhaps it should be a basic category on its own—and it would serve well

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41 See particularly *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1995); and *What is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Hadot's perspective was disseminated to Anglophone scholarship on Kierkegaard in noteworthy papers by Brian Gregor, Nicolae Irina, and Matthew Sharpe. See Gregor, "The Text as Mirror: Kierkegaard and Hadot on Transformative Reading," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 28, no. 1 (2011), 65–84; Irina, "Pierre Hadot: Philosophy as a Way of Life: Hadot and Kierkegaard's Socrates," in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Philosophy, Tome II: Francophone Philosophy* (vol. 11 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 157–172; and Sharpe, "Socratic Ironies: Reading Hadot, Reading Kierkegaard," in *Sophia* 55 (2016): 409-435. But prior to those papers, the maieutic reading had already received attention in the Anglophone world, mainly through the writings of Benjamin Daise, Jakob Howland, and not least Paul Muench, whose doctoral thesis at the University of Pittsburgh was on the Socratic task of Kierkegaard. See Daise, *Kierkegaard's Socratic Art* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000); Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A Study in Philosophy and Faith* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006); and Muench, "The Socratic Method of Kierkegaard's Pseudonym Johannes Climacus: Indirect Communication and the Art of »Taking Away«," in *Søren Kierkegaard and the Word(s)*, ed. Poul Houe and Gordon Marino (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 2003) 130–150; "Kierkegaard's Socratic Task," (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2006); "Kierkegaard's Socratic Point of View" in *A Companion to Socrates*, ed. Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); and "Kierkegaard's Socratic Pseudonym: A Profile of Johannes Climacus," in *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, ed. Rick Anthony Furtak (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 25–44.

42 *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates* (CI). Edited and translated by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1989. Kierkegaard's magister dissertation at the University of Copenhagen on Socratic irony.

43 It is published as an appendix to *The Moment and Late Writings* (M), edited and translated by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1998. It was written roughly six weeks before Kierkegaard's demise at the age of 42.

44 These concepts will be defined in §1.1.2.

45 He would be turned into the equivalent of a Rinzai Zen master, whose *kōans*, or non-sense statements, are meant to indirectly enlighten people. Seen from that perspective, the maieutic reading is in the vicinity of the purely literary reading and resembles its excesses. — It should be noted that the maieutic reading can be made compatible with the *Point of View* testimonial approach.

as such because of its fundamental contrast to the other categories. The basic tenets of the moderate reading can be recapitulated in the following terms:

(1) The literal-minded reading and the purely literary reading are seen as excesses to be avoided.

(2) The *Point of View* testimonial reading is rejected.

(3) Kierkegaard is regarded as the author of all of his writings, both signed and pseudonymous.

(4) Kierkegaard's decisions on pseudonymity are respected and recognised as a matter of consideration, without cutting the link between the pseudonymous authors and their creator.

(5) Kierkegaard's decisions on publication are taken into account, so that unpublished writings need to be treated with care and preferably only used to support interpretation based on published works.[46]

In addition to these five general tenets, one could add two decisive positions that Schönbaumsfeld has in common with, for instance, Louis Mackey and Michael Strawser, namely the following:

(6) Kierkegaard is fundamentally a poet-philosopher of a certain kind.

(7) Kierkegaard's philosophy is fundamentally non-teleological in the sense that there is no teleological system of subjectivity, no ladder to paradise.[47]

I have already accounted for the first tenet, namely what it means to navigate between the excesses of the first two basic categories—and the tenets on authorship, pseudonymity, and publication can be understood in precisely that context. The rejection of the *Point of View* testimonial reading is consequential for interpreting Kierkegaard as a non-teleological poet-philosopher. Such an interpretation does not rely solely on a particular textual evidence, but rather on an impression of his entire body of work and reasoning in relation to it. However, the argument for such a conception is usually centred on Kierkegaard's authorial explanation from 1846, construed in context of key passages in *Postscript*, the work to which it was

46 See Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres*, 6 et al.

47 Harvie Ferguson is also a notable example of a non-teleological reader, as I'll mention in §1.3.

appended.[48] The interpretive strategy of Mackey can be considered close enough to the moderate reading in order to be classified as such, although he can be accused of occupying the purely literary border territory, and perhaps occasionally crossing the line by overstressing aesthetic elements.[49] Strawser's interpretive strategy is also in line with the basic tenets of the moderate reading—and it can be regarded as a counterforce to Mackie, entrenching the properly philosophical aspect of the moderate reading. He offers a view of Kierkegaard's body of work, according to which the aesthetic dimension is prevented from being eclipsed by the religious one and vice versa. Moreover, he rejects any interpretive strategy that removes the deep ambiguity between its religious side and its aesthetic side.[50] Without such ambiguity, in his view, the dialectical structure of Kierkegaard's body of work is ruined, so that the reader is confronted with a didactic demand rather than an existential choice.[51] Strawser's insistence on ambiguity is a good fit for the moderate reading and can be regarded as a version of its stance against a teleological system of subjectivity.[52]

The theatrical reading, which can alternatively be referred to as staged or dramatic, is not necessarily opposed to any of the tenets of the moderate reading. However, the most suitable vantage point on Kierkegaard's authorship is determined to be the institution of the theatre,

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48 I will account for the authorial explanation in §1.2.1 and Kierkegaard's essential vocation will be addressed in § 1.3.1.

49 Mackey's early position in *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* is labelled as "poetic" by Westfall and the revised position in *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* as "deconstructive. The poetry term that Mackie applies in his early description of Kierkegaard's vocation does not turn him into a purely literary reader, because the term does not denote ordinary prose, but rather the sort of philosophy that the moderate reading stipulates. His later "deconstructive" addition is centred on the status of Kierkegaard's signed writings, which he came to see as *de facto* pseudonymous. Such conclusion results from the complex layers of masks that Kierkegaard adopts through pseudonymous authors and characters: "when a man fabricates as many masks to hide behind as Kierkegaard does, one cannot trust his (purportedly) direct asseverations. And when he signs his own name, it no longer has the effects of the signature." Mackey, *Points of View* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1986), 188. In other words, Kierkegaard's extensive use of pseudonymity creates, according to Mackey, a challenge for interpretation beyond the pseudonymous works; it puts a question mark on everything he wrote and uttered, including his instructions on his own authorship, so that nothing can be taken at face value. Such refusal to prioritise the signed writings over the pseudonymous ones is in line with the moderate reading—and supports such reading by further undermining the *Point of View* testimonial reading, according to which Kierkegaard's signed and published *On My Work as an Author* is turned into an exegetical cornerstone.

50 Michael Strawser, *Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard from Irony to Edification* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1997), 235–9.

51 Strawser distinguishes between the dialectical structure of the authorship in a narrow sense, which e.g. excludes *The Concept of Irony* and *The Point of View*, and the higher dialectical structure of the Kierkegaardian corpus, that is to say his body of work in its entirety. In order to clarify terms, Kierkegaard's "body of work" refers to his entire authorship, his oeuvre or corpus, contrary to the "first authorship" or "pseudonymous authorship" (in a narrow sense), which usually refers to the pseudonymous works Kierkegaard takes credit for in "A First and Last Explanation" which was appended to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, namely the following works: *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Repetition*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, *Prefaces*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *Stages on Life's Way*, and *Postscript* itself, as well as three articles published in *Fædrelandet* (PV 625). Moreover, when I refer to "the authorship," without any qualification like "first" or "in a narrow sense," I am referring to Kierkegaard's body of work, and when I refer to "the pseudonymous authorship," without qualification, I am referring his whole corpus of pseudonymous works.

52 Westfall describes Strawser's approach as intermediary between the poetic approach of Mackie and what I refer to as the *Point of View* testimonial approach ("On Kierkegaard's Work as an Author," 13). However, such description is incorrect. Strawser reflects the moderate reading by emphatically arguing against granting the *Point of View* testimony any privileged exegetical status.

in the sense that his activity as an author is compared to a creator and stage director of plays with philosophical relevance, in which he even preserves a role for himself. The theatrical reading is usually centred on the work *Repetition*, which has noteworthy passages on the theatre, as well lending itself particularly well to stage performance. Among scholars who have made noteworthy contributions to the theatrical interpretation are Henning Fenger, George Pattison, Martijn Boven, Martin Matuštík, and Carl Hughes. In addition to my alignment with Schönbaumsfeld's moderate strategy, my approach to Kierkegaard is chiefly inspired by Fenger, Pattison, and Boven, whose writings on the Kierkegaardian theatre are scattered with valuable insights. Fenger's interpretive strategy is designated as "deceptive reading" by Westfall, which hardly does it justice.[53] The deception he identifies applies to the self-description of Kierkegaard, particularly in *Point of View*, but it does not go far beyond a definite rejection of the testimonial reading. Rather, the most suitable categorisation is theatrical. In Fenger's *Kierkegaard, the Myths and Their Origins*, a book that resulted from an extensive research of original Danish sources, the pseudonyms are regarded as roles and the authorship is claimed to have theatrical roots: "Who dares deny that Kierkegaard's relationship to the theatre is lifelong, personal, passionate, existential? He spent most of his life's evenings in the Royal Theater, and he was more frequently in the theater than in the church."[54] In the same vein, Pattison's essay "Play It Again: Kierkegaard's *Repetition* as Philosophy and Drama," describes the theatre as "utterly integral" to Kierkegaard's life and as his "central and abiding passion," which "deeply shaped" his writings.[55] In an analogous way to a significant portion of Kierkegaard's body of work, the theatre signifies the audience's imaginary identification with roles and life-views, so that both can be regarded as an education in possibility and thus as a cultivation of freedom.[56] Along those lines, Boven maintains in a recent essay, "A Theater of Ideas: Performance and Performativity in Kierkegaard's *Repetition*," that a theatre of ideas was developed by Kierkegaard, "in which philosophical and existential problems are performed rather than represented." The ideas are performed instead of conventionally represented, because the

53 Westfall, "On Kierkegaard's Work as an Author," 18.

54 Henning Fenger, *Kierkegaard, the Myths and Their Origins: Studies in the Kierkegaardian Papers and Letters*, trans. George C. Schoolfield (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 21. The work was originally published in Danish under the title *Kierkegaard-Myter og Kierkegaard-Kilder: 9 kildekritiske studier I de kierkegaardske papirer, breve og aktstykker* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1976).

55 George Pattison, "Play It Again: Kierkegaard's *Repetition* as Philosophy and Drama," in *Theatrical Theology: Explorations in Performing the Faith*, ed. Wesley Lander Lugt and Trevor Hart (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 114–115 and 123. Other essays by Pattison that are devoted to the subject are the following: "Bakhtin's Category of Carnival in the Interpretation of the Writings of Søren Kierkegaard," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2006): 100–128; and "The Bonfire of the Genres: Kierkegaard's Literary Kaleidoscope," in *Kierkegaard, Literature, and the Arts*, ed. Eric Ziolkowski (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 39–54.

56 Ibid., 120.

aim is to "confront the reader" with "unresolved problems" rather than to offer "well-defined solutions."[57] The theatrical approaches of Fenger, Pattison, and Boven can be characterised by an emphasis on a theatre where freedom is actualised, while the approaches of Matuštík and Hughes can be described as being more teleological in nature—and thus less in line with the moderate reading.[58]

I have now explored the landscape of ways of reading Kierkegaard. I have provided a rough map that serves well for orientation, as well as preparing the ground for my own reading of Kierkegaard, which I will now discuss.

1.1.2 Moderate theatrical interpretation

As a young man in Copenhagen, Kierkegaard spent much time in the city's Royal Theatre (*Det Kongelige Teater*), which at that point had become a significant institution in Denmark's cultural life. He was often captivated by theatrical performances and his first steps into the world of ideas were intertwined with his thoughts on plays and operas he attended, including Goethe's tragedy *Faust*, Scribe's comedy *The First Love*, and Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, which all inseminated the first part of *Either/Or*.[59] The work *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*,[60] an analysis of drama by Kierkegaard's pseudonym of Inter et Inter—in which the skills of a famous actress at the theatre are applauded—is also based on his own experience as a theatregoer. The actress in question, Johane Luise Heiberg, was the wife of Johan Ludvig Heiberg, who was a central figure in Danish cultural life during a large portion of its renowned Golden Age and the director of the Royal Theatre for seven

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57 Martijn Boven, "A Theater of Ideas: Performance and Performativity in Kierkegaard's *Repetition*," in *Kierkegaard, Literature, and the Arts*, ed. Eric Ziolkowski (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 117–18.

58 Matuštík presents *Point of View* as "stage directions for the dramatization of Kierkegaard's works," and where "the authorship becomes accessible through a play or film called *Kierkegaard*." See "Reading 'Kierkegaard' as a Drama," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Vol. 22: The Point of View*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010), 411. The value of his reading relates to his interpretation of *Point of View* specifically. He draws attention to its theatrical aspects; Kierkegaard is scripting his life and work rather than aiming for the most truthful account. The disadvantage, from my point of view, is that the storyline of his Kierkegaardian drama still follows the questionable narrative of *Point of View*, so it is untenable for those who seek to go beyond semi-fictional narrative in their interpretation. Moreover, to depict the authorship as a drama structured by *Point of View* trivialises Kierkegaard's philosophy in a way that makes it hard to distinguish it from a version of the purely literary reading: the conceptual content is undermined and the whole thing becomes a play that ends in religious awakening. Similar criticism can be directed against Hughes, who offers a theatrical reading according to which various stage settings of desire lead the audience to the end-goal of desiring God infinitely. See Carl S. Hughes, *Kierkegaard and the Staging of Desire* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2014). Matuštík and Hughes represent what should be avoided in a theatrical reading.

59 Pattison, "Play It Again," 113. Pattison mentions *Don Giovanni* and *The First Love* in this context, but it is safe to add *Faust*: although Kierkegaard's preoccupation with the mythical figure of Faust was largely derived from written sources, not limited to Goethe, the original impact seem to have been "presentations of dramatic scenes" from Goethe's *Faust* in addition to Bournonville's ballet. See Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H Kirmmse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 74–75.

60 In the Princeton series it is published alongside *Christian Discourses*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton NJ: PUP, 1997), 301–325.

years from 1849. Kierkegaard's entrance into cultural life was, in the words of Pattison, "as a young and talented member of the Heiberg circle."[61] Moreover, the posthumously published essay "Phister as Captain Scipio"[62] by Kierkegaard's pseudonym Procul—in which the skills of an eminent actor at the theatre is hailed—is also based on Kierkegaard's own experience as a member of audience.[63]

It is not uncommon for authors to seek inspiration in the theatre, just as it is not uncommon for playwriters to seek inspiration in literature and philosophy, but there has been a persistent sense in scholarship on Kierkegaard that the link between his authorship and the theatre reaches far beyond any ordinary stimulus. The reason is the nature of the authorship: the creation of pseudonymous editors and authors, who in turn beget fictional figures, who often interact with each other and whose story is sometimes revealed. Kierkegaard can be seen as the stage director behind the curtains, who is also a scriptwriter, the creator of various roles and scenes—and indeed the creator of the whole drama. In this regard, Pattison draws attention to the writings of Martin Thust.[64] A paper by Thust was published in German in 1925 in which he likened Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship to the genre of "marionette theatre."[65] Pattison's explanation of this comparison is illuminating: "What Thust meant by this was that Kierkegaard's characters are not three-dimensional figures of the kind we might expect to encounter in a realist novel . . . but nor do they have the kind of one-dimensionality of characters in a mediocre novel. Rather, they represent particular spiritual attitudes or movements."[66] Such interpretation matches a journal entry by Kierkegaard where he states that a pseudonym "creates a poetical person" and that it is excellent for accentuating a point, a stance, a position" (PV 301).[67]

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61 George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1999). First published 1992 by Macmillan Academic (Basingstoke, Hampshire). The relationship between Kierkegaard and Johan Heiberg deteriorated after Heiberg's review of *Either/Or*, which was disappointing to its author, and subsequently Heiberg's Hegelianism became a frequent target of Kierkegaard.

62 In the Princeton series it is published as an addendum to *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton NJ: PUP, 1997), 327–344.

63 The theatre was also a great attraction for Kierkegaard outside Copenhagen. During his trips to Berlin, he favoured the local Königstädter Theatre at Alexenderplatz where, for instance, he saw Nestroy's farce *The Talisman* which he discussed at length in *Repetition*, while he attended the Potsdam production of Sophocles's tragedy *Antigone*, which probably inspired his detailed discussion of it in *Either/Or*. In addition, two playwrights left a particularly strong impression on Kierkegaard, both intellectually and personally: Lessing and Shakespeare. See e.g. Bruce H. Kirmmse, ed., *Encounters with Kierkegaard*, trans. Bruce H Kirmmse and Virginia R. Laursen (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 171.

64 George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), 161. See also Pattison, "Play It Again," 122.

65 Martin Thust (1925) "Das Marionettentheater Sören Kierkegaards," *Zeitwende* I: 13–38. Marionettes are puppets.

66 Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, 161.

67 Supp.; JP VI 6421 (*Pap.* X1 A 450) *n.d.*, 1849.

However, if comparison to marionettes would be the only analogy to the theatre that can be made in this context, the theatrical connection would be limited, as Pattison observes.[68] But there is more to this connection, a feature that counters the immobility and stagnation of the marionettes. In an influential book from 1968, *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze emphasises theatrical features of both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche that are not sufficiently captured by immobile marionettes, but rather represent the full force of motion and change applied to actual human life:

> In all their work, *movement* is at issue. Their objection to Hegel is that he does not go beyond false movement—in other words, the abstract logical movement of "mediation." They want to put metaphysics in motion, in action. . . . It is a question of making movement itself a work, . . . of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind. This is the idea of a man of the theatre, the idea of a director before his time. In this sense, something completely new begins with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. . . . They invent an incredible equivalent of theatre within philosophy, thereby founding simultaneously this theatre of the future and a new philosophy.[69]

Deleuze is correct in identifying "movement" as fundamental to Kierkegaard's authorship and he is also correct in stressing its opposition to the "false movement" of Hegelian mediation, as I will later address.[70] Deleuze's view of Kierkegaard as a "director" is in line with Fenger's position in *Myths and Their Origins*, but Fenger goes further by maintaining that Kierkegaard was not only the author of his works but also an actor in his own play, so that through his signed writings, including the autobiographical ones, he is assuming a role in the drama.[71] In other words, the director is not merely pulling the strings, but joins the show. So, the theatrical aspect of Kierkegaard's works is not limited to the pseudonymous authorship, but extends to works he signed by his own name, including the upbuilding discourses, as Pattison indicates in relation to Thust's perspective of Kierkegaard's characters as marionettes presenting life-views:

> If, as Thust claims, this is true of the 'personalities' presented in the pseudonyms—the Seducer, the Assessor, Constantin Constantius and the rest—it is no less true of the various figures that appear in the pages of the upbuilding works. The concerned one, the melancholy one, youth and age, etc., are not three-dimensional characters and are fairly

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68 Pattison, "Play It Again," 122–23.

69 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Bloomsbury, 2014/1968), 10. Pattison mentions Deleuze in a footnote in the passage where he discusses Martin Thust (*Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, 161 n11).

70 See §1.3 and chapter three. Movement is not only significant for understanding the nature of Kierkegaard's body of work; it is also directly relevant to my topic, as it's essential to the concept of becoming.

71 Fenger, *Kierkegaard, the Myths and Their Origins*, 21–3.

> clearly not intended to be taken as individuals but as types, figures or, even, emblems. . . . They are not personalities but personifications[.][72]

There is arguably no easy distinction between the indirect communication of the pseudonymous works and the direct communication of the signed ones, and if Fenger is correct, the autobiographical writings are also part of a single "theatre of ideas," which is a phrase aptly chosen for Kierkegaard's literary production in Boven's essay.[73] As I have mentioned, Boven reads Kierkegaard as developing such theatre in order to "perform" existential problems without clear-cut answers rather than presenting them in a bundle with authoritative solutions, so that "unresolved problems are dramatized without providing a way out."[74] Boven explains this somewhat obscurely in terms of a break with "the Aristotelian tradition of mimetic representation" and "catharsis."[75] A more obvious context is Kierkegaard's essential preoccupation with subjectivity, inwardness, inward deepening, and indirect communication—which brings us to the aspects that my moderate theatrical reading has in common with its maieutic counterpart.

Kierkegaard's concept of subjectivity (*subjektivitet*) refers to the dimension of reality that is determined by the conditions of being a subject, how subjects relate to the world and the subjective quality of experience (CUP-I 204). To be a subject means to be a conscious being, that is to say, an agent to which mental states can be ascribed, including perceptions, experiences, beliefs and passions. Subjective truth, according to Kierkegaard, has to do with how subjects relate to what is external to them and how they appropriate values and ideals. "Subjective understanding," to quote C. Stephen Evans, "is an understanding that bears on a person's own existence, how life should be lived."[76] The question of how one should live one's life is the original question of ethics in antiquity—and in that sense of the term Kierkegaard is first and foremost an ethical thinker. Objectivity, the antonym of subjectivity, is a term which is often used by people to indicate impartiality, for example when a judgement is influenced by facts instead of feelings or biases. However, at its etymological and philosophical root, an object designates something that a subject becomes aware of and potentially acts upon or wields power over, so that the world of objects is, from the

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72 Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses*, 161.

73 Boven, "A Theater of Ideas," 117.

74 Ibid., 118.

75 Ibid.

76 C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 30. For discussion of Kierkegaard's concept of subjectivity, see e.g. Jamie Turnbull, "Objectivity/Subjectivity" in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome V: Objectivity to Sacrifice* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2015), 1–6.

perspective of subjects, the factual venue of subjective agency. Subjects can of course be viewed as objects by other subjects, but in their inner being they have access to a subjective dimension that is qualitatively different from the objective world. By objective truth, the antonym of subjective truth, Kierkegaard is primarily referring to propositions being true, justified, or well-established, as is the case with historical and scientific truth, which is dependent on observation, hypothesis and provisional confirmation or falsification. In other words, objective truth refers to empirical facts or speculative theories about the world. Accordingly, Robert C. Roberts observes that subjectivity for Kierkegaard "suggests a contrast with the interests, attitudes, and compulsions . . . associated with the activities of speculative philosophy and professional historical scholarship."[77] Kierkegaard does not disparage objective truth, but he rejects the idea that its application to subjective matters is sufficient for the subjective dimension, that is to say, sufficient to engage with existential questions, including questions regarding ethics and religion. Facts can of course have subjective impact, according to him, but they are always approached, interpreted and appropriated subjectively—and, at the end of the day, it is the quality of the subjective constitution that is paramount in the existential field.

Kierkegaard's concept of inwardness (*Inderlighed*) refers to subjective intensity and devotedness. Subjects exhibit inwardness through the resolutions they form, the sincerity in which they identify with their resolutions, and the degree to which the resolutions govern their behaviour in the situations that confront them. The concepts of inwardness and subjectivity are closely related, even to the extent that they can at times be used interchangeably. An example of such use is Climacus's claim that "the thesis that subjectivity, inwardness, is truth contains the Socratic wisdom, the undying merit of which is to have paid attention to the essential meaning of existing, of the knower's being an existing person" (CUP-I 204). Yet, there are subtle differences between subjectivity and inwardness, as can be detected in my definitions. It is often the case that nuances in Kierkegaard's terminology result from the polemical context in question—and some of the different shades of meaning between the two terms are indeed well explained with reference to their antonymic targets. The contrast that inwardness is capturing is neither akin to the contrast between an introvert and an extrovert nor should inwardness be mistaken for detached introspection, which the Dane would associate with the passivity of an observer. Rather, the contrast is between one who is heartily spirited and one who is heartlessly apathetic, or between one who has passion of a certain

[77] Robert C. Roberts, "Existence, Emotion, and Virtue: Classical themes in Kierkegaard," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 178.

kind and one who lacks it, particularly in the sense that Hannay articulates as follows: "As with Hegel's *Innerlichkeit*, the sense is not that of inward-directedness, which the term 'Indvorteshed', also found in the *Postscript*, conveys. 'Inderlighed' refers to an inner warmth, sincerity, seriousness and wholeheartedness in one's concern for what matters, a 'heartfeltness' not applied to something but which comes *from* within."[78] Moreover, the esteem of the spirited subject that Kierkegaard has in mind, is not determined by mundane externalities, such as reputation, public opinion, or a position in a social hierarchy. The term "outwardness" is not part of English vocabulary, but as a hypothetical antonym of inwardness, its meaning would not be some sort of outward-directedness. Rather it would be captured by apathy in relation to one's subjectivity, so that one's subjective formation is defined by such mundane externalities. To quote Roberts again, "a life characterised by 'outwardness' would be a formation of personality all right, but in a sort of oblivion that an outwardly successful life can mask a corrupt, trivial, or empty 'heart.'"[79] Thus, the antonym of inwardness can connote superficiality.[80]

Kierkegaard's concept of "inward deepening" (*Inderliggjørelse*) is prone to being misunderstood in its English rendition in the Princeton series. The Danish term does not include any deepening at all: the meaning of *Inderliggjørelse* is "making inward." Christian Tolstrup is correct in observing that the term "brings out the temporal dimension of inwardness, the *process* of becoming inward."[81] Inward here has the connotation of inner warmth and sincerity as in the cognate word of inwardness, but one should also keep in mind the close link to subjectivity: making inward or the process of becoming inward is fundamentally to make something subjective or the process of becoming subjective. It is pointed out by Hannay that Kierkegaard sometimes uses the Danish term for deepening, *fordybning*, in relation to inwardness, so it is questionable to use "inward deepening" when the original text contains no *fordybning*, "not least because he shows considerable care and consistency in his choice of terms."[82] Hannay is also right, for the same reason, in doubting the translation of Swenson and Lowrie, who opt for "intensification of inwardness."

78 Alastair Hannay, introduction to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (CUP-H), by Søren Kierkegaard, ed. and trans. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), xxxviii–xxxix.

79 Roberts, "Classic Themes in Kierkegaard," 178.

80 Its Latin etymology is a good fit for the antonymic target of inwardness: to be of the surface or pertaining to the surface. The lack of inwardness signifies what one is at the surface, without the dimension of the interior: an animated object whose heart is simply an organ.

81 Christian Fink Tolstrup, "Inwardness/Inward Deepening" in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome IV: Individual to Novel* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2014), 36. The term process refers to a sequence of events.

82 Hannay, introduction to *Postscript* (CUP-H), xxxix.

However, Hannay's own primary choice, "taking to heart," can be criticised for being too colloquial, because the term must be regarded as part of Kierkegaard's philosophical or technical vocabulary. Hannay's secondary choice, when context demands, is "inner absorption"—and that translation has at least the advantage of satisfactorily capturing the meaning in a non-colloquial way.[83] However, there is a perfectly good English psychological verb, often used in philosophy, which matches the meaning in a suitable manner: to "internalise." The act of internalising is to appropriate or incorporate something to one's nature so that it becomes part of one's mental and emotional constitution, which is precisely Kierkegaard's meaning by the term. Appropriation is another term that can be used instead of inward deepening.[84] The most important discussion of inward deepening is to be found in *Postscript* and a key passage connects it directly to the notion of becoming: "Subjective reflection turns inward toward subjectivity and in this inward deepening will be of the truth, and in such a way that . . . subjectivity as such becomes the final factor and objectivity the vanishing. Here it is not forgotten, even for a single moment, that the subject is existing, and that existing is a becoming" (CUP-I 196). So, such internalisation advances one's subjectivity and increases one's awareness as an existing subject, as well as making one aware that proper temporal existence is not stagnation of inactive being, but a relentless activity of becoming—of advancing one's subjectivity through internalisation. It does not manifest itself in growing introversion or solipsism, but rather in a more passionate involvement with affairs, so that one actively engages with the outside world.

The subjective thinker is not in a position to dictate observations. Rather, such philosophers must therapeutically help others to make their own observations, from their own first-person perspective—which leads us to Kierkegaard's method of indirect communication (*indirecte Meddelelse*). While direct communication is just a way of communicating where speakers clearly and straightforwardly relay their thoughts, indirect communication is "communication in reflection" (PV 7).[85] What is meant by reflection here is that the substance of the communication is not on the surface, so to speak, but consists in inspiring thought processes within readers, so that they are helped into reflection on important topics. In a similar way to Socrates, Kierkegaard frequently uses parody, humour, irony, and

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83 Ibid.

84 In what proceeds I will not completely drop the term "inward deepening," as it is the most widely accepted and widely used translation—and indeed the translation of the Princeton series that I refer to throughout the dissertation—but I will interchangeably use the synonymous terms of "internalising" and "appropriating."

85 I cite here the booklet *On My Work as an Author* (published in *The Point of View* volume of the Princeton series). Although it is part of what I regard as the false *Point of View* narrative, it also contains some material that casts light on the content of Kierkegaard's conceptual framework.

absurdity to convey a message—and his colourful cast of pseudonyms are spokespersons for a range of competing life-views or worldviews, which collectively are meant to have some sort of an impact on the reader, to "appeal inwardly," as Mooney puts it: "The use of pseudonyms is a pedagogical strategy. It works by first drawing readers one by one into a life-view. The view is meant to appeal inwardly, as if in fact it could be one's own. Having established a sympathetic bond with the reader, the pseudonym can then expose from within that intimate relationship, its limitations and inadequacies."[86] I will address pseudonymity and life-views in the next section, but at this point I shall attend to the link between indirect communication and inward appeal. A silent premise of Kierkegaard, although one that is constantly being indicated, is that subjective advancement cannot simply be triggered or stimulated by direct communication of ideas, because the subjective involvement of internalisation is essential to any such advancement—and such subjective involvement requires the stimulation of independent thought processes in the subject. This is the reason skilled artistic individuals—not least poets, novelists, playwrights, and stage directors—are generally more effective in having an ethical impact on people than authors of philosophy textbooks. The communication of creative writers and stage directors is indirect, in the Kierkegaardian sense, and they appeal inwardly to their readers and theatregoers. However, contrary to artists of any sort, authors of philosophy textbooks tend to be equipped with a sophisticated framework of ideas and are thus more qualified in offering constructive material for potential internalisation. Their method of producing and communicating that material, however, is the source of their impotency in comparison to artists. Viewed in this light, authors like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are arguably superior to both camps as ethical thinkers, because they combine the artistry of thought-provoking communication with intriguing philosophical refinement. Their ideas are anything but superficial and they appeal inwardly.

Deleuze did not provide such context to his above-mentioned claim that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche invented "an incredible equivalent of theatre within philosophy, thereby founding simultaneously this theatre of the future and a new philosophy," but it is indeed the context in which his claim should be understood. The same applies to the claim of Boven that generated my account of subjectivity, inwardness, inward deepening and indirect communication: Kierkegaard "performs" existential problems, without definitive answers. This is because presenting such problems conventionally and offering clear-cut solutions to them lacks

[86] Edward Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 6.

what can be described as the maieutic wonder of the theatre, according to which much of the meaning is contributed by the theatregoers, resulting in intimate engagement with the ideas presented. This is where subjectivity can be stimulated and advanced through process of personal and reflective internalisation, preferably filtered through critical assessment.

This brings us back to Socrates, who likened his activity to the art of midwifery.[87] As midwives help pregnant women to give birth, he conceived of himself as helping his interlocutors to give birth to a new state of consciousness. The key component of his maieutic practice was the method of *elenchus*, a dialectical cross-examination in order to highlight hidden assumptions, disclose underlying ideas, and stimulate critical thought. Pierre Hadot, who during his lifetime was a leading authority on ancient philosophy in France, maintains that such philosophy, particularly the Socratic tradition, is not an impersonal theoretical investigation and construction of philosophical systems, but ultimately a way of life, a practical activity aimed at the formation of the self. The practice was conducted through what Hadot calls "spiritual exercises," where the aim is to transform one's way of being in the world. Socratic dialogues should be understood as such spiritual exercises. Hadot puts spiritual exercises in two categories: on the one hand, an inward concentration of the self upon itself, and on the other hand, an outward contemplation on the self's relation to the world. There are only a handful of modern philosophers, according to Hadot, who have upheld antiquity's preoccupation with self-formation—first and foremost Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, who he calls the two great Socratics,[88] but also for example Wittgenstein, whose philosophy Hadot is credited for introducing and promoting in France. "Kierkegaard's goal," according to Hadot, "was to make the reader aware of his mistakes, not by directly refuting them, but by setting them forth in such a way that their absurdity would become clearly apparent." This, Hadot adds, "is as Socratic as it can be."[89]

Hadot is getting at an essential feature of Kierkegaard's philosophy, but his account is representative of the reductionism that characterises the maieutic reading of Kierkegaard. To make people aware of a mistaken outlook, contradictions and incoherencies, is only part of what the Dane is doing in his works—and many of his texts would be grossly miscomprehended if they were interpreted solely through such a filter. A good example to demonstrate the point is the technique used extensively in the work *Repetition*, of which the pseudonymous author and protagonist is Constantin Constantius. The work is appropriately described

87 See e.g. Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. John McDowell (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 109-110.
88 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 147.
89 Ibid., 150.

by Boven in terms of a "performative writing strategy that is animated by a dialectic of advance and withdrawal."[90] This performative technique is an offshoot of Kierkegaard's interest in the "tension between concealment and disclosure."[91] The concept of repetition, which I will introduce later in this chapter and discuss in more detail in chapter four, is not presented as philosophical treatise by Constantius. Rather, the idea of repetition, which is an elegant and significant philosophical concept, is presented in a manner that is intriguing yet scant—and when the reader has got enough information to activate his imagination regarding the full meaning of such concept, the idea is confused with repetition in a banally colloquial sense. Constantius's muddled understanding of philosophical repetition leads him to an experiment in which he applies the concept to a real-life situation in a way that must be regarded as wrong-headed to most readers. Subsequently, Constantius abandons his idea of repetition. A young man that he corresponds with is in opposite circumstances: while Constantius begins with intellectual speculation that he later applies to real situation, the young man is confronted with an actual situation and is searching for good solution to it in a philosophy of repetition, which he subsequently tries to conceptually grasp. As detached observers, the readers are in a position to help the young man in his search by offering him the best of what Constantius had to offer, in addition to their own observations in relation to it. Moreover, the readers are in a position to see through the conceptual confusion of Constantius and to suggest to him a less absurd application of it, for example based on insights gained from the young man's existential problem. I need not say more about the scenarios to state the point: the performative technique both stimulates the subjectivity of readers and makes them active participants in shaping the meaning of the concept that is discussed. Kierkegaard—as the ultimate author—achieves such effects by advancing the philosophical idea of repetition and then withdrawing it by turning it into a tragicomic confusion. This process is repeated a few times in the work, and it constitutes what Boven means by the dialectic of advancement and withdrawal. The idea of repetition is embodied in fictional characters and thus enters into the tangles of actual life, which makes it challenging to determine its conceptual content. The groundwork of constructing the idea is established by Kierkegaard, but much work needs to be done to finish the construction. "The dialectic of advance and withdrawal," as Boven puts it, "ensures that the reader has to struggle through a series of confusions and misunderstandings: "In this way Constantius has turned *Repetition* into an enigma. This enigma will become fruitful only when the reader first identifies the confusions and

90 Boven, "A Theater of Ideas," 116.

91 Ibid., 117.

misunderstandings and then starts to develop the emerging category of repetition on his or her own."[92] However, to deliberately turn a concept into an enigma does not necessarily deplete it of meaningful content—and it is on that point that Boven is at his best:

> It would be a mistake, however, to view this performative writing strategy as a kind of postmodern "empty play" that destroys meaning rather than creating it. The unresolved problems are not meaningless. Rather, they imply an excess of meaning that has to be narrowed down by the reader. Other pseudonyms, such as Johannes de Silentio, Climacus, Anti-Climacus, and Vigilius Haufniensis, develop similar performative writing strategies. In fact, one might even argue that—at least to some extent—Kierkegaard also relies on the strategies when he writes under his own name as veronymous author.[93]

The latter half of the passage is a guarded articulation of what I earlier attributed to Pattison, namely that there is substantial unity in Kierkegaard's body of work: the performative technique is applied across the authorship and any clear-cut categorical distinction between the pseudonymous works and the signed ones is questionable.[94] The first half, however, is an excellent demonstration of what distinguishes the theatrical reading from the purely literary reading: while the meaningful conceptual content is excessive according to the theatrical reading, it is seriously restrained according to the purely literary reading, if not completely absent. In this respect, the maieutic reading tends to be close to the poverty of the purely literary one: the historical Socrates is not considered to have put forward any new content, but simply to have triggered more awareness of some sort, and his Danish counterpart is understood in the same way. In clear contrast, there is an overflow of content, according to the theatrical interpretation, which secondary literature must confine. It is an open question as to what of the excessive content can be attributed to the Dane, but a case can be made for a plausible answer. If we compare the theatrical reading further to the purely literary one, the observation can be made that according to Poole's literary reading, for instance, the creator—the stage director and author of the script— is radically separated from his own drama: its meaning is detached from him and enters into an artistic orphanage. The analogy can *per se* be regarded as sufficient to undermine such an exegetical standpoint. After all, Kierkegaard must be regarded as the ultimate author of his own writings, as Schönbaumsfeld is keen to emphasise, and even though one must take the pseudonymity into account, one cannot make the split so radical that Kierkegaard himself is thrown out of the picture, exiled by his own pseudonyms. A *de facto* component of the purely literary reading is to either refuse

92 Ibid., 123.

93 Ibid., 118–119.

94 See also my earlier footnote on Mackie: n49.

that the signed writings, which for the most part are of a religious sort, contain anything of philosophical significance, or to regard Kierkegaard's signature as having the status of yet another pseudonym. The latter option is in line with my contention, but neither option improves the case of advocates for the purely literary category: either they would have to except one of the leading roles, the one played by Kierkegaard, from the overall meaning of the literary production, or they would have to refuse to make any connection between the author as the author and the author as an actor. It is reasonable to suggest that the two roles cannot be conflated, but to split them up absolutely is a counterintuitive conclusion that requires more thorough justification than Poole provides.

The gap between the theatrical reading and the literal-minded reading should also be clear by now: from the perspective of the former, the literal-minded reading bluntly attributes the stance of every role to the views of the stage director, even lines that did not make it to the play, thus turning him into a confused and contradictory figure. The theatrical interpretation, at least my variety of it, navigates smoothly between the extremes of the literal-minded category and the purely literary one: it takes the literary dimension into account without overextending it, and thus draining the Kierkegaardian corpus of philosophical content. An argument can be made for the view that the theatrical reading is a misnomer and that a more straightforward designation would simply be "poetic" or "literary reading," because Kierkegaard is after all a poetic or literary philosopher, but not someone who produces pieces for theatre.[95] At the end of day the label is not crucial, but two counterarguments could be made to the poetic or literary label: on the one hand, it misleadingly indicates a connection to the interpretation that I refer to as "purely literary," and on the other hand, it is not unreasonable to let the designation emphasise Kierkegaard's close connection to the theatre, which played a large role in shaping his writings. I began this subsection by drawing attention to the biographical link to the theatre and the link established by impression of his entire body of work, but the theatrical context also finds support in individual passages in his writings, most notably in the report of Constantius in *Repetition*, which has probably inspired theatrical reading more than anything else:

> There is probably no young person with any imagination who has not at some time been enthralled by the magic of theater and wished to be swept along into that artificial actuality in order like a double to see and hear himself and to split himself up into every possible variation of himself and nevertheless in such a way that every variation is still

[95] See e.g. Marcia C. Robinson, "Kierkegaard's Existential Play: Storytelling and the Development of the Religious Imagination in the Authorship," in *Kierkegaard, Literature, and the Arts*, ed. Eric Ziolkowski (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 71–84.

> himself. . . . In such a self-vision of the imagination, the individual is not an actual shape but a shadow, or, more correctly, the actual shape is invisibly present and therefore is not satisfied to cast one shadow, but the individual has a variety of shadows, all of which resemble him and which momentarily have equal status as being himself. As yet the personality is not discerned, and its energy is betokened only in the passion of possibility, for the same thing happens in the spiritual life as with many plants—the main shoot comes last. (R 154)

The wonder of the theatre, its "magic," is described as an "artificial actuality" which theatregoers can employ to reflect on their own existence, traits of their character and the various directions their lives can take. Note that Kierkegaard uses the phrase "self-vision of the imagination" in order to express the state of mind of those who experience the theatrical performance. In *Postscript*, Johannes Climacus praises the human faculty of imagination and rejects its subordination to reason: "with regard to existence," he says, "thinking is not at all superior to imagination and feeling but is coordinate" (CUP-I 346–7). It is also stated in *Postscript* that the "poet's medium is the medium of imagination" (CUP-I 420)—and the term poet is to be understood in a broad sense, as covering artistic creators and philosophers of certain kind.[96] In her *Transforming Vision*, M. Jamie Ferreira focuses on the role of imagination in Kierkegaard's philosophy—and she correctly points out that "one can see in his writings a striking preoccupation with imagination which expresses itself finally in a remarkable appreciation of the value and even necessity of imaginative activity for genuine self-development."[97]

The value of the Kierkegaardian theatre is not least to stimulate such self-development—and, as will become evident in chapter three, self-development and self-becoming are synonymous terms. Although excessive imagination can undermine stable identity, so that one becomes lost in possibility, one is prone to stagnate in habit and dogma without imagination, as Roberto Unger is keen to point out throughout his authorship. In *Passion: An Essay on Personality*, he stresses the close link between "surrender to habit" and the "defeat of the imagination," with the result that a "diehard commitment to a particular way of dividing up the world closes itself off to perception and arguments that this classification may exclude."[98] The "shadows" referred to in the passage is a term used for the possibilities

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96 See discussion in §1.3.

97 M. Jamie Ferreira, *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 1–2. Ferreira's observations regarding imagination will feature in section 3.2 on the movement towards a concrete self and in section 3.3 on transitions between existence-spheres.

98 Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Passion: An Essay on Personality* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1986), 70. Regarding imagination and dogma, see e.g. by the same author *The Self Awakened: Pragmatism Unbound* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 237.

that one can realise, the plurality of potential selves that can serve as platform for one's own self-shaping.[99] Members of the audience recognise their own shadows in the play—they are brought to consciousness as projected options, so that one is concretely confronted by one's freedom. Pattison points out that possibilities constitute the "dawn of freedom in the human spirit," so that "by trying out the broadest possible multiplicity of roles . . . the young person is educated in possibility and, in this way, educated in freedom."[100] It would be wrong, however, to confine such education to young people, because while options are constantly limited by choice and circumstances as people grow older, possibility remains a constitutive feature of temporality, however limited it may be, and its eclipse is confined to the moment of death. Insightfully, Pattison observes that "our lives as citizens . . . will be all the more serious the more I realize that our task as adults is, precisely, to be the roles we choose for ourselves."[101] It is through decisions—the application of freedom—that individuals gradually actualise their chosen roles. "Theatre teaches us what it means to be in a role," as Pattison puts it, "but we have then to choose our role and step forth in it onto life's stage," which includes the task of developing "a coherent and sustainable identity through time."[102] This is not meant to indicate that there is always an ironic gap between the role we play and who we really are. On the contrary, no distinction can ultimately be made between the role we play and who we become, which is precisely the acumen of Kurt Vonnegut's famous line in his introduction to *Mother Night*: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be."[103]

The possibilities are different expressions of the universally human—and, as Climacus puts it, "the subjective thinker's task is to transform himself into an instrument that clearly and definitely expresses in existence the essentially human" (CUP-I 356). The stage director in the Kierkegaardian theatre is a subjective thinker who imaginatively explores the human potential. The spectators of the drama imaginatively and selectively try on the masks of

99 "The shadow" became a prominent term in the psychology of Carl Jung, but its meaning only partly corresponds to Kierkegaard's meaning. In Jungian psychology it signifies the primitive side of one's personality; material that is usually shameful and unpleasant, yet simultaneously a source of vitality and robustness. Jung maintains that "everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is." Carl G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1938), 93 (the work is based on Jung's Terry Lectures that were given in English at Yale University in 1937). From the Jungian perspective, the shadows in the Kierkegaardian theatre might be viewed as possibilities that belong to members of audience at the subconscious level.

100 Pattison, "Play It Again," 120.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

103 Kurt Vonnegut, *Mother Night* (New York, NY: Dial Press, 2009/1962), v.

personalities—what the ancient Greeks called *prósōpon* and the Romans *dramatis personæ*.[104]

I have now accounted for the essentials of my theatrical reading of Kierkegaard. However, as I mentioned in the overview of exegetical positions, there are versions of theatrical interpretation that I criticise.[105] My sort of theatrical interpretation is in line with the basic tenets of the moderate reading and it can be regarded as a subset of that category. Consequently, it is appropriate to designate it as "moderate theatrical reading." Such an approach avoids the excesses of the literal-minded category and the purely literary one, as well as rejecting the *Point of View* testimonial reading; it regards Kierkegaard as the ultimate author of his entire body of work, whether pseudonymous or not, while still respecting the pseudonymity by taking it into consideration; it grants more value to writings that Kierkegaard decided to publish than writings that he decided not to publish, so that the latter is in a supportive role; it views Kierkegaard's essential vocation to be a certain type of a non-teleological philosopher, whose works contain abundance of ideas with conceptual content; and finally I can add the perceived unity of his body of work, so that it escapes unequivocal division.

Now, I will turn to critical assessment of Kierkegaard's authorial testimonies, the former of which for the most part supports my reading, while the latter is potentially the strongest argument against it.

1.2 Assessment of authorial testimonies

1.2.1 The first and last explanation of 1846

Kierkegaard intended to end his authorship after *Postscript* was published in late February 1846. At that point he considered it timely to say a few words about the authorship, which he did in a short announcement that was attached to the publication. Its title is "A First and Last Explanation,"[106] thus clearly denoting that no further clarifying comments were to be expected. Kierkegaard begins the announcement by declaring himself to be the author of the pseudonymous works that he had written. Such an announcement, in itself, can be viewed as suggesting that Kierkegaard sought to establish at least some sort of connection to his pseudonymously published writings, which contravenes an interpretive position according to which he is radically disassociated from his pseudonyms. The "Explanation" continues

[104] In this context I use the term "spectators" as a synonym for "theatregoers," in line with the Danish conventional term for such audience members. See Pattison, "Play It Again," 117.

[105] See n58.

[106] Hereafter: "Explanation."

with his statement that the pseudonymity was not accidental, but rather had "an *essential* basis in the production itself":

> What has been written, then, is mine, but only insofar as I, by means of audible lines, have placed the life-view of the creat*ing*, poetically actual individuality in his mouth, for my relation is even more remote than that of a poet, who *poetizes* characters and yet in the preface is *himself* the *author*. That is, I am impersonally or personally in the third person *as souffleur* [prompter] who has poetically produced the *authors*, whose *prefaces* in turn are their productions, as their *names* are also. Thus in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them, since it is impossible to have that to a doubly reflected communication. (CUP-I 625–626).

The picture that is being depicted of the pseudonymous authorship is clear enough: the pseudonyms are spokespersons for a range of competing life-views, dialectically orchestrated by Kierkegaard—and his own life-view should not be confused with any of theirs. As a consequence, he declares that what is said in the works should not be attributed to him. Moreover, he seeks to remove his authorial primacy completely, presumably in order not to affect independent interpretation of the writings, because their meaning should not be dictated but based on the subjective experience of readers. Therefore, it is not surprising that Kierkegaard asks those who want to quote passages from the works to cite "the respective pseudonymous author's name" instead of his own (CUP-I 627). Such symbolic elimination of the author is reminiscent to the idea expressed in a well-known essay from 1967, "the Death of the Author" by Roland Barthes,[107] although the difference being that Kierkegaard sought to remove himself instead of being removed by readers. The authorial elimination is also in line with his Socratic maieutics, according to which the therapist seeks to remove herself from the equation in order to secure the independent reasoning and development of the patient. The rest of the "Explanation" does not add anything of substance, but there are two topics in relation to the passage that I will seek to clarify. On the one hand I will address how radically the pseudonymity should be viewed and whether a close analysis dismantles, to some degree, the description that Kierkegaard offers. On the other hand, I will discuss the notion of a life-view and put it in context to the non-teleological subjectivity that is presented in the work that the "Explanation" is appended to: *Postscript*.

[107] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 142–148.

It must be admitted that the passage does not rule out the previously mentioned reading of Poole, according to which radical distinction must be made between Kierkegaard and his pseudonymous authors, so that no ideas presented in the pseudonymous works can be attributed to the Dane, not even if they are constructed through an interpretive filter that takes the pseudonymity into account.[108] However, such reading would lose its ground as an exegetical strategy if the pseudonymity is critically examined, no matter whether textually and biographically. Such examination of the pseudonymous authorship reveals that the claimed independence of the pseudonyms from their creator becomes rough around the edges and sometimes comical in its imperfection. One example of the comical sort is to be found in *The Concept of Anxiety* by Vigilius Haufniensis. In a footnote to a reference to "Schelling's school," Haufniensis recounts what Schelling expressed in his lectures in Berlin, which Haufniensis seems to have attended (CA 59). He would have shared that lecture room with many aspiring intellectuals, including Bakunin, Burckhardt and Engels, not to forget Kierkegaard himself. It is hardly indicative of a well-planned strategy of pseudonymity to let the pseudonym incidentally share biographical details of the unnamed author. Biographical information supports such inference, because, as Søren Bruun demonstrates in his paper "The Genesis of *The Concept of Anxiety*," Kierkegaard wrote the work under the presupposition that it would be published under his own name—and only made the decision to publish it pseudonymously at the very last moment without making any further changes.[109] Unfortunately he seems to have forgotten to alter passages that make him identifiable as an author, such as the Schelling footnote. It is also in relation to the pseudonymity of *Concept of Anxiety* that we encounter a report in a journal entry that supports the contention that Kierkegaard's signed writings were also pseudonymous: "After all, I always have a poetic relationship to my works, and therefore I am pseudonymous" (CA 222).[110] He seems to be saying that no matter whether the work has his signature or not, his link to his writings is always "poetic," which is a term he often uses to describe the indirect communication of the pseudonymous authorship.

Moreover, prior to publication of *Sickness* in 1849 and *Practice in Christianity*[111] the year after, his journals inform us that they were originally meant to be bear his own name, but

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108 See §1.1.1.

109 Søren Bruun, "The Genesis of *The Concept of Anxiety*," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2001): 5.

110 JP V 5732 (*Pap*. V A 34), n.d., 1844.

111 *Practice in Christianity*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1991). Hereafter: *Practice*.

after much hesitation he decided to create for them the new pseudonym of Anti-Climacus.[112] The matter was eventually not resolved until he contacted the printer and was told that no further changes could be made—but traces of the abandoned plan remained in the texts, such as in a footnote in *Practice* where Anti-Climacus refers to "the works of some pseudonymous writers," (PC 81) and by the context he must partly be referring to his own earlier writings, as Howard and Edna Hong point out in an endnote: "The reference must be to Johannes Climacus, writer of *Postscript*, and to Anti-Climacus, writer of *Sickness unto Death*. But the author of *Practice* is Anti-Climacus. The reference is no doubt an unchanged remnant of Kierkegaard's idea of direct authorship before his decision to use a pseudonym."[113] The fact that some of the pseudonymous works where written as veronymous but became pseudonymous without altering the text, suggests that the strategy of pseudonymity was not a well-orchestrated tactic—and the journals support the view that it was rather emotionally and subconsciously improvised, acquiring a large portion of its rational meaning in retrospect.[114] This applies to at least one work that the "Explanation" addresses, *Concept of Anxiety*, and it puts a question mark on how accurately the "Explanation" describes Kierkegaard's intention at the time the works were written. Perhaps it should be understood as expressing his perspective at the time it was composed, or that its status as a direct communication should be doubted and that its meaning has to be processed through the interpretive filter that must be applied to works of indirect communication, which arguably includes the entire corpus, as I have claimed. Both can be true—and such suspicion receives further support from the situation one is confronted by when one examines the philosophical presuppositions on which the various pseudonyms rely. For sure, there are important differences between them, but their similarities and shared conceptual framework undermines any interpretive strategy according to which Kierkegaard is disassociated from his pseudonyms. The most striking example is Anti-Climacus's relational depiction of selfhood in *Sickness*, which is anticipated and relied upon by Climacus in *Postscript*, but one can for instance also mention the curious continuity between Haufniensis's *Concept of Anxiety* and the authorship of Anti-Climacus. The reason is of course that all of the

112 Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, introduction to *The Sickness unto Death* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1980), xix–xx; JP VI 6762 (Pap. X^4 A 299). See also e.g. PV 172 (supp.), PV 194 (supp.), PV 199 (supp.), and PV 201 (supp.); JP VI 6271 (Pap. IX A 390) n.d. 1848; JP VI 6416 (Pap. X^1 A 422) June 4, 1849; JP VI 6431 (Pap. X^1 A 510) n.d. 1849; JP VI 6445 (Pap. X^1 A 546) n.d. 1849. The name Anti-Climacus is often wrongly assumed to mean opposition to Johannes Climacus, the pseudonymous author of *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. The correct denotation is that the prefix 'anti' in this context does not mean 'against' but rather 'before' in an order of rank, so that Anti-Climacus is ranked higher than Climacus.

113 Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, notes to *Practice in Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1991), 385 (n19).

114 See the cited entries in n112 above.

pseudonyms are created by Kierkegaard and represent to large extent aspects of Kierkegaard's own philosophy, including a feature he shares with many profound thinkers: an inner conflict. However, I am bringing this up to oppose the reading of Poole and others who swim near the deep end of the purely literary reading and my contention is certainly not to dive into the opposite end of the literal-minded reading. Rather, the pseudonymity must be kept in mind in any serious construction of Kierkegaard's ideas—and features such as authorial identity, intent, genre and style must be carefully taken into account. Plenty of scholars do this explicitly by attributing writings to the relevant pseudonym instead of Kierkegaard, but it is also fine to do this implicitly as Pattison does in his *Philosophy of Kierkegaard* with a prudent clarification that is perfectly in line with what I have established:

> Contrary to the practice of many contemporary Kierkegaard commentators I shall, frequently, use the name "Kierkegaard" for the author of the various pseudonymous books. Clearly there are some views expressed in some of the pseudonymous works that Kierkegaard elsewhere disowns. Even *within* a work such as *Either/Or* we have one half of the book constituting an argument against the other half. Nevertheless, I think there is important continuity between much that is in the pseudonymous works and what Kierkegaard said in his own voice. If Johannes Climacus does not say all that Kierkegaard has to say, in his own voice or in the guise of a later pseudonym such as Anti-Climacus, he does prepare the way for this more decisive word and the way in which he does so is importantly shaped by what Kierkegaard himself finally wants to get said. That Kierkegaard himself "disowns" Johannes Climacus does not, in fact, mean that Climacus is irrelevant to Kierkegaard or Kierkegaard to Climacus. Basically, I do not regard this as a case where a general rule can be bluntly applied one way or the other. Context—the context of one's own writing as well as Kierkegaard's (but that, too, of course)—must be decisive.[115]

Context is decisive, as Pattison stresses, and there is no timesaving method that can replace it. Context is relevant to most, if not all, interpretation, but it is particularly critical in the delicate assignment of constructing Kierkegaard's philosophy. In the context of the theatrical frame of reference, it is the stage director's mind I am trying to dissect through the many interrelated plays he scripts and oversees—and he has such an overwhelming presence in the rehearsals that all of the performances on stage, even a minor teasing glance of an actor in a supporting role, to some extent reflect something about the director, although this something has to be understood within the context of the role, the storyline of the play, and its connection to the director's other pieces of drama. The presence of the director is even so

[115] George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Chesham, Bucks: Acumen, 2005), 10.

overwhelming that he takes on one of the leading roles, as the above-mentioned journal entry in relation to *Concept of Anxiety* implies.

In detecting the conceptual framework of the director, Kierkegaard, it is particularly revealing when pseudonyms that are supposed to be dissimilar turn out be in agreement on some essential issues or when a pseudonym expresses views that seem out of character for that persona, in other words when the voices of "marionettes" begin to break down and speak out of tune, replaced momentarily by the wavering, yet often profound, voice of their creator. This is probably what Adorno has in mind when he writes that criticism must "confront the abstract figures of the pseudonymity and to determine the coherence of the organization accordingly," before adding: "Under this pressure the deceptive consistency of the pseudonyms may crumble; as it is, the superficial coherence of the philosophical doctrine inevitably blocks the way to any real insight."[116]

Nevertheless, however imperfect the strategy of pseudonymity may be, the pseudonyms do represent a range of life-views, as the "Explanation" claims. In the pseudonymous authorship, the concept of a life-view (*Livs-Anskuelse*) appears for the first time in the second part of *Either/Or*, edited by Victor Eremita, where the author of that part, Judge William, introduces it by stating that "every human being, no matter how slightly gifted he is, however subordinate his position in life may be, has a natural need to formulate a life-view, a conception of the meaning of life and its purpose" (EO-II 179). The definition is straightforward enough—and it corresponds to how the term is used elsewhere in Kierkegaard's body of work, without contradiction, so we can reasonably assume that it belongs to his own outlook.[117] The most extensive coverage of life-views appears before the authorship in a narrow sense began, in one of his earliest essays, "From the Papers of One Still Living", which is part of the *Early Polemical Writings* volume in the Princeton series. In that essay, Kierkegaard, at the age of 25, criticises the Danish celebrity writer Hans Christian Andersen for lacking a life-view: "For a life-view is more than a quintessence or a sum of propositions maintained in its abstract neutrality; it is more than experience [*Erfaring*], which as such is always fragmentary. It is, namely, the transubstantiation of experience; it is an unshakable certainty in oneself won from all experience [*Empirie*]" (EPW 76). These lines indicate that a life-view is not merely a conception of life's meaning and purpose, but such conception that rests on confidence that is nourished from within instead of from external experience.

116 Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, 11.

117 See e.g. EPW 76–77, SLW 162 & 342; CUP-I 433, 474 & 598; and TA 12–16, 18–21, 33, 124 & 126.

Julia Watkin comments on the passage to which the cited lines belong in her introduction to the *Early Polemical Writings*. She links it to the emergence of Kierkegaard's view of the individual, "that authentic existence lies in more than fragmentary experience or the holding of abstract propositions" and that a proper life-view "authentically develops the person as an individual."[118] It is noteworthy that immediately after the cited lines, Kierkegaard mentions both secular Stoicism and Christianity as examples of valid life-views, which indicates that he has a variety of different life-views in mind (EPW 76–77). In any case, the focal point is not the substance of life-views, but rather that a genuine life-view is necessarily subjective and grounded in the act of internalising a certain fundamental perspective.[119]

So, life-views are subjective stances that provide meaning and orientation, but then the question must be raised as to whether there is any system of subjectivity, according to which people can know their way around in the market of life-views. In other words, can we systematically rank life-views in order to inform people which ones are the worst, and which ones are the best? In order to do so objectively, the subjective existence must have an ultimate end-goal, a *telos* to which every individual ought to be striving to reach. *Postscript*—the work that was at the time of its publication supposed to be the *grand finale* of the authorship, as well as being the work to which the Explanation is appended—arguably offers us good insight into Kierkegaard's reply to the question. Climacus stresses that while "a logical system can be given . . . a system of existence [*Tilværelsens System*] cannon be given" (CUP-I 109). His main target is without doubt the Hegelian system of sublation,[120] but he is still speaking in general terms against an existential system of any kind. Climacus elaborates on his statement by adding that existence is a system solely "for God," but that "it cannot be a system for any existing [*existerende*] spirit" (CUP-I 118). The concept of God in this context has a similar function as the transcendental realm in Kant's scheme of things, namely the function of a presupposed objective vantage point, to which we have no access. Subjectively we can have faith in certain objective vantage points through which we import an evaluative standard into our parlance, a standard of good and bad of some sort. Such import happens of course also historically and collectively, so that people incorporate communal ethical standards that permeate linguistic practices. Most individuals simply internalise the social norms of their upbringing and subconsciously avoid deviation from the prevailing life-view of their family or community. When Climacus asserts that "becoming a

118 Julia Watkin, introduction to *Early Polemical* Writings (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1990), xxviii.

119 See discussion of subjectivity and inward deepening in §1.1.2.

120 §See 1.3.

subjective individual" is the highest task assigned to every human being" (CUP-I 133), he is referring to sufficient awareness of one's freedom, so that one's life-view becomes an active choice rather than remaining a passive inheritance. The subjective dimension opens up in its full potential when one's freedom in this sense is brought to consciousness. Subjectively awakened individuals can of course choose to change nothing and freely adhere to the creed of their community, but even if such a choice is made, the situation is not the same as before, because their lives have become a task, for which they have made themselves responsible, in a sense. However, there is no system of existence, according to Climacus, and there is consequently no manual that can provide universally applicable instructions for the task of subjectivity, nothing that can ultimately take away one's responsibility when one confronts one's freedom. The subtle meaning of Climacus's humour of revoking *Postscript* in the end might indeed well be admonition to readers that they should not try to turn it into such a manual, that ultimately each and every one of them stand entirely alone in their choice of a life-view and their subjective development.

The "Explanation" appended to *Postscript*, on the pseudonyms and their life-views, is best read as conveying the pluralistic standpoint that I am attributing to Climacus. Kierkegaard, according to my contention, accepts neither that a universally valid subjective system can be provided nor that there is a universally valid *telos* for human existence. Rather, behind thick smoke and beneath layers of clay, there is an abyss of freedom. This raises the question of how one explains the fact that Kierkegaard and many of his pseudonyms, not least Climacus, often write in teleological terms and even name a *telos*. The answer is that it is done within the horizon of a life-view. The existence-spheres, which I will discuss in chapter three, can be viewed as broad categories of life-views, reflecting a more fundamental horizon of meaning—and the broadest classification is a binary distinction between an aesthetic mode of living, on the one hand, and an ethical-religious mode of living, on the other hand. Both of those modes of living have their own *telos* in Kierkegaard's scheme of things: the aim that is assumed in aesthetic striving is happiness (*Lykke*) while the aim that is assumed in ethical-religious striving is blessedness (*Salighed*).[121] The former term in Danish is etymologically identical to "luck" in English and the happiness in question has connotations in that direction, for example, the meaning expressed by the saying "happy-go-lucky." The latter term, however, has often the prefix "eternal" (*evige*) and it is usually translated by the Hongs as

[121] It is debatable whether the *telos* of *Salighed* applies not only to a religious mode of living but also to an ethical mode of living, but I will argue for such interpretation in chapter three.

"eternal happiness." "Blessedness" captures the meaning more accurately and the same applies to "bliss" and "well-being," which can be used as alternatives.[122]

Such discussion invites comparison to Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia*, which is variously translated as "happiness," "flourishing," or "well-being."[123] *Eudaimonia* is a universal *telos* of existence in the loosest way possible, because it is vague enough to mostly preserve the open-endedness of subjectivity. The assertation that the teleological aim of us all is some vague well-being, can be regarded, for practical purposes, to be equivalent to a non-teleological position. However, a further step is taken by Kierkegaard, according to my reading, because the one vague end-goal stipulated by Aristotle is replaced by at least two vague end-goals—resting on a prior choice between modes of living—which amounts to breaking away from teleological ontology altogether. Furthermore, there is myriad of life-views within these broad categories, each with their potential variations of end-goals, and certainly nothing that rules out the idea that one overcomes the need for a *telos*.

To repeat, there is no system of existence. However, there are various facts about existence, including facts about different life-views, human freedom, selfhood, and the process of becoming. It is from such reading of Kierkegaard's "Explanation" of 1846 that I turn to the thorny topic of the *Point of View* writings that he composed two years later.

1.2.2 The autobiographical narrative of 1848

The occasion for Kierkegaard's autobiographical writings from 1848 was the intended second publication of his aesthetic debut, *Either/Or*, which he suspected would reinforce the public perception of him as primarily an aesthetic author of some sort. The writings consist of the following booklets: *On My Work as an Author*,[124] *The Point of View for My Work as*

[122] Curiously, and perhaps revealingly to some extent, a common English word has the same etymological roots as the Danish word *Salighed*, although the meaning of the English one has diverged from its Danish counterpart: "silliness." Blessedness is often felt to be more profound than happiness, which is a sentiment I share, but to be primarily concerned with one's eternal well-being is prone to be judged as a silliness from a down-to-earth secular perspective, even a silliness bordering on madness. It signals the depth of Christianity that instead of denying its silliness, it bites the bullet and embraces it, as is evident in the idea of being a "fool for Christ." Likewise, religious intoxication is often described as "divine madness," a term that first appears in Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*, where it had positive connotations. See Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 41 (§256b).

[123] Roger Crisp, Glossary to Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. and ed. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 206; see also his introduction to the work, x–xiv.

[124] Consists of "The Accounting," and "My Position as a Religious Author in 'Christendom' and My Strategy" (appendix).

an Author,[125] *The Single Individual*,[126] and *Armed Neutrality*, as well as notes in relation to those works. A collection of these texts was published as the volume *The Point of View* in the Princeton series, but my reference to *Point of View* is to the piece, rather than the volume. *Point of View* is by far the most substantial of the pieces.[127] It can be described as an auto-biographical literary testimony, but Kierkegaard decided not to publish it, as I will later discuss. However, after a long period of indecision, he eventually decided to have a much-abridged redaction of it published in 1851, which is the volume's first piece: *On my Work as an Author*—counting merely one essay of less than ten pages called "The Accounting" and an appendix of similar length, in total four time less than the original *Point of View* booklet—and it is the only piece of the volume for which he opted for publication, while the rest of them were published posthumously as part of his Nachlass.[128]

Near the beginning of the abridged version of the testimony, Kierkegaard explains the "movement" of his authorship as follows: "*from* 'the poet,' from the aesthetic—from 'the philosopher,' from the speculative—*to* the indication of the most inward qualification of the essentially Christian, **from** the *pseudonymous Either/Or*, **through** *Concluding Postscript*, with *my name as editor*, **to** *Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*" (PV 5–6).[129] So, the authorship is divided into three parts, beginning with the aesthetic component, epitomised by *Either/Or*; then going through the speculative component, epitomised by *Postscript*; and finally moving to the religious component, epitomised by *Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, which in the Princeton series is published as part four of *Christian Discourses*.[130] The work representing the religious category is a surprising one, but Kierkegaard later inserted a long footnote in that respect, where he draws attention to the crucial role of his most recent pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, in presenting the religious element. The footnote ends with a statement that "the category" of his "whole authorship" is "to *make aware* of the

125 Part one consists of "The Equivocalness or Duplexity in the Whole Authorship, Whether the Author Is an Aesthetic or a Religious Author" and "The Explanation: That the Author Is and Was a Religious Author"; part two consists of "The Aesthetic Writing," "*Concluding Postscript*," "The Religious Writing," "Personal Existing in Relation to the Aesthetic Writing," "Personal Existing in Relation to the Religious Writing," and "Governance's Part in My Authorship," in addition to an epilogue, a conclusion and a supplement.

126 Consists of "Two "Notes" Concerning My Work as an Author," "Preface," "For the Dedication to That Single Individual," "A Word on the Relation of My Work as an Author to "the Single Individual," "Postscript" and "Postscript to the Two Notes."

127 This is the normal procedure in secondary literature.

128 Thus, when I refer to the "abridged" version, I am referring to the redaction that Kierkegaard decided to publish. The version that was published received its final form in 1849, but it is a reworking of the *Point of View* material, composed in 1848.

129 Kierkegaard himself made the decision with regard to words in italics and words in bold, presumably to make the meaning even more transparent.

130 *Christian Discourses* (CD), trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1997), 247–300.

religious, the essentially Christian" (PV 6), which is subsequently repeated in the main text of the work (PV 12). The purpose of the indirect communication, according to the abridged testimony, is "to *deceive into the truth*," namely the Christian truth, while the purpose of the direct communication is to express that truth directly (PV 7). Correspondingly, Kierkegaard maintains in the *Point of View* booklet that being an aesthetic author was his "deception" (PV 63), while the process of "becoming a Christian" is claimed to be "the *issue*" of the authorship (PV 63). In the abridged version he elaborates on the deception by referring to the maieutic method: the movement that leads to Christianity "began maieutically with aesthetic production," which according to the testimony are all "maieutic in nature"—and in a footnote he explains that "the maieutic lies in the relation between the aesthetic writing as the beginning and the religious as the [*telos*]" (PV 7).[131] Moreover, he seeks to clarify that the Christian movement should not be understood as constituting the development of his views, but rather as being the idea of the authorship, so that "the authorship, regarded as a totality" should be viewed as "religious from first to last" (PV 6).

The fundamental message of the literary testimony has now been accounted for: the suspicious self-description that we refer to as Kierkegaard's *Point of View* narrative. The teleological aspect of the *Point of View* testimonial reading is clear from the account, as well as how the maieutic reading can metamorphose into its testimonial counterpart. Those who belong to the *Point of View* exegetical category consider the *Point of View* narrative to be basically true, no matter whether the testimony has shaped their perspective on the authorship or provided evidence for their prior interpretive predisposition. Julia Watkin can be mentioned as a clear-cut member of that category. Assuming the honesty and accuracy of Kierkegaard's self-description, she views *Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* as his effort "to circumnavigate the risk inherent in indirect communication, namely, that the reader may fail to understand it," so that the testimony serves as his "insurance policy" against potential misinterpretation.[132] She treats the *Point of View* narrative as a direct and reliable guide to the entire authorship—and the same applies to other members of the category, including the Danish theologian Niels-Jørgen Cappelørn, whose essay, "The Retrospective Understanding of Søren Kierkegaard's Total Production" is brought up in that

131 Kierkegaard uses the Greek spelling of *telos*, τέλος, which is repeated in the translation of Howard and Edna Hong along with the rendition "goal" in brackets.

132 Julia Watkin, *Kierkegaard* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1997), 51.

context by both David Law in his survey of how *Point of View* has been interpreted,[133] and by Westfall in his previously mentioned overview of exegetical strategies. In what follows, I will intertwine some of Cappelørn's points with my critical examination of the *Point of View* narrative.

In the passage of *On My Work as an Author* where it is stated that the movement towards Christianity is the idea of the authorship, Kierkegaard illustrates his claim by saying that "this movement was traversed or delineated *uno tenore*, in one breath" (PV 6). The expression must be meant to stress that he was struck with the idea behind the authorship, so that it dawned on him, instead of the idea being gradually shaped by experience as his writings progressed. Kierkegaard illustrates the point further by using a metaphor according to which an undivided web is spun by one spider with a single purpose: " Just as one versed in natural science promptly knows from the crisscrossing threads in a web the ingenious little creature whose web it is, so an insightful person will also know that to this authorship there corresponds as the source someone who *qua* author 'has willed only one thing'" (PV 6). At this point, one would be excused in assuming Kierkegaard to be saying that he conceived of the nature of his authorship before he began working on it, so that the Kierkegaardian spider was struck by an idea of a certain kind of web before the spinning began. However, such assumption would be mistaken, because it soon becomes clear in the text that Kierkegaard's idea was retrospective, a meaning imposed on the web after it was spun. Near the end of "Accounting" he comments on his own testimony as follows: "This is how I *now* understand the whole. From the beginning I could not quite see what has indeed also been my own development" (PV 12). A few lines later, in the final paragraph of "Accounting," he reiterates that the authorship has been his development: "'Before God,' religiously, when I speak with myself, I call my whole work as an author my own upbringing and development, but not in the sense as if I were now complete or completely finished with regard to needing

133 David R. Law, "A Cacophony of Voices: The Multiple Authors and Readers of Kierkegaard's *The Point of View for my Work as an Author*," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Vol. 22: The Point of View*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010), 12; Westfall, "On Kierkegaard's Work as an Author," 11; N. J. Cappelørn, "The Retrospective Understanding of Søren Kierkegaard's Total Production," in *Kierkegaard: Resources and Results*, ed. Alastair McKinnon (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 18–38; earlier version in German: "Kierkegaards eigener 'Gesichtspunkt': 'Vorvärts zu leben, aber rückwärts zu verstehen," in *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 17 (1975): 61–75. Michael Theunissen and Wilfried Greve are also mentioned by Law as advocates of the *Point of View* testimonial reading; see their "Einleitung: Kierkgeaards Werk und Wirkung," in Michael Theunissen and Wilfried Greve, eds., *Materialien zur Philosophie Søren Kierkegaards* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979). Moreover, Walter Lowrie and Eleanor D. Helms can be added to that list; see Lowrie's *A Short Life of Kierkegaard* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 2013/1942); and Helms's "Can Kierkegaard Be Serious? A Phenomenological Point of View for Kierkegaard's Authorship" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Volume 22: The Point of View*, ed. Robert L Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010), 238–267.

upbringing and development" (PV 12).[134] Thus, he does not claim to have been fully conscious of his task as an author from the beginning, but that its meaning rather dawned on him gradually, so that his "one breath" turns out to be a long one.

In line with this admission, Cappelørn regards "the phrase 'to live forwards, but to understand backwards' as a key to the understanding of Kierkegaard's life and as a hermeneutical principle for the interpretation of his work and thought."[135] In other words, Cappelørn applies Kierkegaard's observation that "one lives prospectively but understands retrospectively" to the authorship, so that its meaning depends on the instructions imposed on it in retrospect: "Kierkegaard's work can only be understood by beginning at the author's conclusion, working backwards through it, with the writings about the authorship and the journals as parallel sources. And these too have to be read and understood retrospectively."[136] However, even if we make the contestable assumption that Kierkegaard's testimony is reliable, why should readers attribute authorial meaning to his works which was absent at the time they were composed? The reply could be along the lines that such meaning was latent in the work or subconsciously present when the work was produced, although the author did not become aware of the meaning until at a later stage. However, such a reply presupposes that the author has privileged access to the content of his subconscious mind, which is not self-evident. Such a concern is related to the difficulty of making any distinction between retrospectively discovering a latent meaning, on the one hand, and simply inventing the meaning *post-factum*, whereas the invented meaning is usually a rationalisation of the past from the perspective of the present—and such rationalisation is prone to change with time in a constant flux that is patterned by one's developing mindset, attitude and circumstances. What is remarkable, is that Kierkegaard himself surpassed his contemporaries in realising difficulties of this sort. The phrase that Cappelørn cites—which is part of a journal entry—has become one of Kierkegaard's widely known sayings, but unfortunately its context has been cast into the shadows:

> Philosophy is perfectly right in saying that life must be understood backward. But then one forgets the other clause—that it must be lived forward. The more one thinks through this clause, the more one concludes that life in temporality never becomes properly

134 See also journal entries in the supplement, e.g. PV 223 and 284.

135 Cappelørn, "The Retrospective Understanding of Kierkegaard's Total Production," 20. The source of the phrase, which has become one of Kierkegaard's most widely known sayings, can be found in CUP-II 187 (JP I 1030 (*Pap.* IV A 164)).

136 Ibid., 36.

> understandable, simply because never at any time does one get perfect repose to take a stance—backward (CUP-II 187).[137]

So, the acceptance of the notion that life must be understood in a backward direction is immediately followed by Kierkegaard's acknowledgement that the "perfect repose" for such comprehension never arrives in one's temporal existence and thus the task cannot be properly done at any time in one's life. Surely, events and actions often become meaningful in retrospect, but such projection of meaning is evaluative, unstable and in constant flux. Moreover, Kierkegaard states the following in *Point of View*: "It might seem that a simple declaration by the author himself . . . is more than adequate; after all, he must know best what is what. I do not, however, think much of declarations in connection with literary productions and am accustomed to take a completely objective attitude to my own" (PV 33).[138] Kierkegaard seems to be admitting that if he switched positions with his readers, he would take the authorial testimony with a grain of salt and would not grant much exegetical authority to it. The reason might be the nature of retrospective meaning that I just addressed or perhaps he knew too well the evasive nature of his own authorial testimonies in order to be able to take such writings by others at face value. Creative thinkers with a poetic impulse have both great ability and great tendency to turn conflicted disarray into a smooth pattern, so that subconscious inclinations acquire the storyline of a Bildungsroman. If Kierkegaard was to encounter some of the fishy passages he included in *Point of View* in a testimony of another writer, the only question worth pondering is whether they would receive his ironic treatment or the humorous version. A good example is the following assurance:

> Strictly speaking, *Either/Or* was written in a monastery, and I can attest (a declaration that is addressed especially to such persons, if they should happen to see this little book, who perhaps have neither the capacity nor the opportunity to survey such a production but who may yet be disturbed by my authorship's odd merging of the religious and the aesthetic), I can attest that the author of *Either/Or* regularly and with monastic scrupulousness spent a certain period of each day reading devotional writings for his own sake, that in fear and much trembling he considered his responsibility. (PV 35–36)

It is as if Kierkegaard is defending himself in a public trial, presenting a Socratic apology against accusations of impiety and corrupting the youth. Such segments are not least strange in light of the fact that he states in the introduction to *Point of View* that it is merely written

137 JP I 1030 (*Pap.* IV A 164).

138 "Declarations" in the passage are "assurances" in Garff's translation.

for "orientation and attestation" while not being "a defence or an apologetics" (PV 24).[139] Moreover, Kierkegaard stresses the importance that works speak for themselves and that declarations by him damage the dialectical quality of the authorship, namely the unceasing duplicity between aesthetic and religious elements: "If in the capacity of a third party, as a reader, I cannot substantiate from the writings that what I am saying is the case, that it cannot be otherwise, it could never occur to me to want to win what I thus consider as lost. If I *qua* author must first make declarations, I easily alter all the writing, which from first to last is dialectical" (PV 33). Once again, these are sound arguments against a large portion of the *Point of View* testimony, made by Kierkegaard himself.

In his paper, "The Eyes of Argus," Joakim Garff comments on the defensive passage above by stating that "even the most generous reader will have to summon up extra generosity to conceive how such assurance—which refers to circumstances which are, from textual point of view, arbitrary—can guarantee the presence of a dialectical 'duplicity' in the authorship."[140] In line with what I have discussed, Garff argues that Kierkegaard retrospectively projects a certain flawed unified vision onto the authorship, not only regarding the movement towards Christianity, but also by, for example, being both selective and inconsistent in what works he mentions as part of his authorship.[141] Garff's title is a reference to the giant Argus in Greek mythology whose moniker was Panoptes, or "all-seeing" in Greek, because he was gifted with many eyes and perfect vision. Graff borrows the phrase from another peculiar passage in *Point of View*:

> The process is this: a poetic and philosophic nature is set aside in order to become a Christian. But the unusual thing is that the movement begins concurrently and therefore is a conscious process; one gets to see how it happens; the other does not commence after a separation of some years from the first. Thus the aesthetic writing is surely a deception, yet in another sense a necessary emptying. The religious is decisively present already from the first moment, has decisive predominance, but for a little while waits patiently so that the poet is allowed to talk himself out, yet watching *with Argus eyes* lest the poet trick it and it all becomes a poet. (PV 77)[142]

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139 Ibid., 553.

140 Joakim Garff, "The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View and Points of View with Respect to Kierkegaard's Activity as an Author*" in *Søren Kierkegaard—Critical Assessment of Leading Philosophers*, ed. Daniel Conway and K.E. Gover (London: Routledge, 2002), 71–96, 76. Garff's paper was first published in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, edited by Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 75–102. See also Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres*, 85.

141 Ibid., 64.

142 The italics is mine.

So, Kierkegaard is maintaining that his religious side watches the poetic elements in his works keenly, or "with Argus eyes," in order to not be tricked by them into mere poetry. The expression can be understood as displaying a certain inner struggle between two aspects of Kierkegaard as an author, reminiscent to a comic sketch where a man's left arm is desperately trying to control the movements of his right arm. The "Argus eyes" metaphor also applies to Garff's scrutiny of Kierkegaard—and one noteworthy observation he makes is that the *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*[143] is categorised as "purely religious writing" in the abridged version of the testimony (PV 9), but previously as "aesthetic writing" in a footnote in the *Point of View* booklet (PV 29).[144] The cause of this contradiction is uncertain, but most likely Kierkegaard changed his mind. Priority must be given to the former description, because it belongs to a piece Kierkegaard decided to publish, while the latter remained unpublished during his lifetime. Nevertheless, the pieces were not written far apart in time—and the disparity indicates that his retrospective account was in flux. Religiosity's surveillance of poetic expression is presumably harder when it is not entirely clear which is which. Garff continues his scrutiny of *Point of View* in his biography of Kierkegaard, where his focus is on a feature that adds to the scepticism about the work's reliability: as well as being structurally muddled and disorganised, the testimony is suspiciously zealous and long-winded, as if the author has something to hide.[145] It should be noted that Garff is for the most part not referring to the compressed *On My Work as an Author* that Kierkegaard decided to publish in 1851 but to the more substantial *Point of View* manuscript. Still, the former has its root in the latter—and the flaws of *Point of View* arguably cast doubt on the abridged version. In any case, it is the testimony found in both booklets that I am contesting—and my critical account appropriately began by focusing on the published one.

To strengthen my case against understanding the Kierkegaardian corpus through the lens of the testimony, it is worthwhile to take a look at some journal entries in relation to its publication. I will account for the relevant entries in a chronological order. The first note concerns the two works of 1848 that Kierkegaard initially toyed with publishing along with *Point of View* as three parts of single volume, namely *Sickness* and *Practice*: "The next publication will be very decisive for my outer life. I always have held on to the remote possibility of seeking a pastoral call if worst comes to worst financially. When I publish the last books,

143 Søren Kierkegaard (EUD) *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1990).

144 Graff, "The Eyes of Argus," 77. See also Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres*, 64.

145 Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 552.

this may well be denied me even if I were to seek it; so the problem will not be as before, if I do dare to undertake it, but rather that it will not even be given to me" (PV 164).[146] This can be interpreted in a straightforward manner as Kierkegaard expressing his worries that the publication of the works would be detrimental for his prospects of being appointed a pastor in the Church of Denmark, in line with his educational background and prolonged aspiration.[147] However, a different reading of the note is plausible, according to which it is telling that he brings up the topic of his career prospects and that the negation is ambiguous, as when job applicants complain that they will probably not be selected. For sure, *Practice*, being polemical against the prevailing Christianity of the Church, can hardly be considered as a normal job application, but Kierkegaard sought to be vindicated by the Church, as can clearly be inferred from his frequent conversations with a high-ranking official within the Church's hierarchy, bishop Jakob Peter Mynster: "I have frequently talked to Mynster . . . and told him what he in part is able to see very well himself. The danger is numerical, that everything disintegrates into parties and sects. Furthermore, the danger is the coalition between political and religious movement. The danger is so great that we run the risk of eventually coming to vote on Christianity" (PC 364–365).[148] This is written in 1851, the year *On My Work as an Author* was published, and Kierkegaard's ideal scenario at that point seems to be vindication by Church authorities that he is speaking the truth about Christianity and subsequently breaking through from isolation to having a role within the Church and thus being an integrated member of public life in his country. This dream collapsed in the subsequent years, but in the period from 1848 to 1851, from when *Point of View* was written and its abridged version published, Kierkegaard's largest obstacle against being taken seriously as either a worthy critic of the Church or its potential representative, was that he had the reputation of being a poet of a dubious sort: full of irony and humour, the author of *Either/Or* and other strange books, a theatre-loving flâneur and even a playboy, probably an aesthete, if not plainly diabolical. In such a context the motivation behind the testimony can be easily guessed—which is also a reason for taking it with a pinch of salt.

The next journal entry I will attend to is from 1849, in which Kierkegaard confesses that the whole truth about himself cannot be revealed by emotionally exclaiming that *Point of View* "must not be published, no, no! . . . I cannot tell the full truth about myself" (PV 174).[149] The

146 JP VI 6229 (*Pap.* IX A 216) *n.d.*, 1848.

147 The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark was and remains a state church, with the benefits of such status.

148 *Pap.* X⁴ A 365 *n.d.*, 1851. Mynster was the bishop of Zealand (*Sjælland*), which is the island where Copenhagen is located and the most populated area of Denmark.

149 JP VI 6327 (*Pap.* X¹ A 78) *n.d.*, 1849.

statement can be read in two different ways, either that *Point of View* contains the truth—but that it should not be published because the truth must remain hidden—or that *Point of View* does not contain the truth, because it must remain hidden, and therefore it should not be published. The reasons Kierkegaard provides support both readings, which suggests that both readings may apply to certain extent: on the one hand he may have been worried about making himself vulnerable and damaging the dialectics of the authorship by having such autobiographical material published, and on the other hand he may have been worried about being driven by circumstances to include too much half-truth and too many white lies for the text to be fit for publication. According to the first reason he provides, what explains him "at the deepest level" is that he is a "penitent," but that he is unable to communicate it in the manuscript (PV 174). It is anyone's guess what exactly is meant by penitence in this context, but in any case, the statement supports the reading that the *Point of View* testimony does not contain the full truth. Such reading also receives support from the second reason, where he laments to have inaccurately described his vocation as an author as a "sacrifice," whereas "rich pleasure" would have been more truthful (PV 175). The third reason, however, supports the reading that he may be burdening himself by publishing the self-description: "Once I have articulated the extraordinary about myself, even with all the guardedness I have used, then I will be stuck with it, and it will be a torment and a fearful responsibility to go on living if I am solemnly looked upon with pathos as someone extraordinary" (PV 175). However, he is not in fact confessing the truth of the testimony, but merely worrying about the consequences of being viewed in line with the description he provides. The fourth and final reason is the one that deserves most attention: "The fact that I cannot give the full truth in portraying myself signifies that essentially I am a poet—and here I shall remain" (PV 175).[150] What is meant by being a poet here is not entirely transparent. There are two main possibilities. Either he is using the term in the sense that he is identifying with being essentially a poet-philosopher of a sort rather than being a religious thinker, as I will discuss in subsection 1.3 in relation to Kierkegaard's vocation. Alternatively, he is identifying with belonging essentially to the aesthetic sphere in the sense that he is unable to make himself universally transparent, which is part and parcel of his idea of the ethical sphere. Perhaps the statement means both, so that Kierkegaard is claiming to be a poet-philosopher who must be secretive about something. In any case, a different picture is painted in *Point of View*, so he seems to be admitting that his self-description in the testimony is not true in some important way, at best not fully

[150] Ibid. Furthermore, in the conclusion of *Point of View*, Kierkegaard's poetic side comes forward in an unexpected twist: "I have nothing more to say, but in conclusion I will allow someone else to speak, my poet" (PV 95).

transparent and conceivably including some *suggestio falsi*. Accordingly, Schönbaumsfeld draws attention to the statement in order to demonstrate that Kierkegaard was aware that his *Point of View* narrative was "in many respects a distortion."[151] To be a penitent at the deepest level and also essentially a poet is a peculiar combination, but a description that strikes one as not entirely implausible in relation to Kierkegaard.

I cannot conclude my account of the journal entries without mentioning two related notes from 1849 that have to do with a puzzling reaction to an external event, which might cast light on Kierkegaard's penitence. In the former note, he had given the printer the green light to "engage typesetters" for *Sickness* and perhaps other works that he had ready for publication, which include *Practice* and *Point of View*, but shortly after the decision he had been informed that Councillor Olsen—the father of Regine, the woman with whom he had broken off an engagement as a young man—has passed away: "That affected me strongly," Kierkegaard says, before adding that if the information had reached him before he sent the letter to the printer "it would have prompted a postponement" (PV 226). It is worth considering why the knowledge of the death of an old man who a long time ago was his potential father-in-law and with whom he was in no contact, would affect publication of his works. After Kierkegaard broke off the engagement, Regine was inconsolable, so her father met with the young Søren to plead to him to reconsider his decision, but he did not back down. The whole event, however, was an emotional turmoil that he seemingly never overcame. She remained very important to him and she was the reader to whom he first and foremost directed his voice in many of his works. It would be a poor approach to the authorship to make such a private affair central to it, but it would also be poor to ignore it completely. The prime example of her impact on the authorship is the concept of the "single individual" (*den Enkelte*), to which Kierkegaard devotes one of the pieces that are collected in the *Point of View* volume. The reason for the odd redundancy inherent in the term is that originally it was not used to address every individual, but one single individual in particular, Regine Olsen.[152] The question of whether she and her family have anything to do with him being a penitent cannot be answered for certain and the same applies to the question of whether the theme of the testimony is shaped by such concerns, but another startling note can be construed as pointing in that direction: "To me it was also remarkable that Councillor

151 Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres*, 66.

152 However, the concept gradually acquired more general meaning, according to which it is contrasted to "the public, the crowd, the numerical" (PV 10n)—and he even states at one point that his "possible ethical significance is unconditionally linked to the category *the single individual*," (PV 119) which he calls "the category through which, in a religious sense, the age, history, the human race must go" (PV 118).

Olsen's death coincided with my intention to make a turn away from the authorship and to appear in the character of a religious author from the very beginning (see a slip in journal NB). And when I appear in the character of the whole authorship as religious, a dedication would essentially relate to her" (PV 230).[153] The slip that Kierkegaard mentions in brackets has unfortunately been lost, as the Hongs point out in an endnote, but at least this indicative note was preserved. What does Kierkegaard mean by his intention "to appear in the character of the religious author from the very beginning"? He is indisputably describing the motivation behind the *Point of View* narrative—and *Point of View* testimonial readers would certainly expect him to choose different words in his description, for instance to say that the death coincided with his intention to reveal himself as a religious author. The fact is, however, that he does not talk in terms of disclosure, but in terms of pretence or semblance. If the note is genuine, which I have no reason to doubt, it cannot be easily ignored, because it is a strong indication that Kierkegaard was staging a role to perform, the character of the essentially religious author, played by the director himself, the poet-philosopher.

The interpretation that I have been advancing with regard to the *Point of View* narrative receives powerful support from the painstaking research of Henning Fenger that I mentioned early on in this chapter.[154] Fenger is sometimes falsely presented as an advocate of a particularly radical position, for instance in David Law's "Cacophony of Voices." In Law's account of those who regard the narrative as "rationalization *post factum*" and "as a questionable attempt to impose a religious meaning on an authorship that was originally composed for other reasons," the following is stated:

> An extreme version of this view is advanced by Henning Fenger, who sees *The Point of View* as a strategy Kierkegaard employs for putting his readers on the wrong track, and as one of Kierkegaard's "snares for historical research." Fenger rather unkindly claims that *The Point of View* "contained various palpable inaccuracies, but it is especially amusing in its blend of a desire for honesty and its naïve persuasion." The evidence, Fenger claims, indicates that Kierkegaard did not conceive of his aesthetic authorship as originally having a religious purpose, and we misunderstand him if we take his claims in *The Point of View* at face value.[155]

The fact is, however, that Fenger's relatively reasonable claims do not exceed the sources he provides, and his ruthlessness is mainly directed at scholars who have steered research on Kierkegaard "down the wrong track at the outset" rather than being directed at the author

153 JP VI 6543 (*Pap.* X2 A 215) *n.d.*, 1849. Regarding the slip, see *Pap*. X² A 69–163.

154 See §1.1.1.

155 Law, "A Cacophony of Voices," 13. See also Fenger, *Kierkegaard, the Myths and Their Origins*, 2 and 29.

himself.[156] Law's "snares for historical research" citation gives the impression that Fenger is attributing to Kierkegaard malicious future-oriented intention, while Fenger's meaning turns out to be much less questionable when viewed in context: "[Kierkegaard] put out snares for his contemporaries and, in the process, for posterity's historical researches as well. His Socratic irony, his system of Chinese boxes, with editors and pseudonyms, and his indirect form of communication were confusing—then as now."[157] Likewise, Fenger is hardly unfair in his verdict that *Point of View* "contained various palpable inaccuracies" and in his judgement that the work "is especially amusing in its blend of a desire for honesty and its naïve self-persuasion."[158] For example, Fenger scrutinises the nature of the duplexity that is claimed to be in the authorship from the beginning, which Kierkegaard backs up as follows: "*Two Upbuilding Discourses* is concurrent with *Either/Or*. The duplexity in the deeper sense, that is, in the sense of the whole authorship, was certainly not what there was talk about at the time: the first and second parts of *Either/Or*. No, the duplexity was: *Either/Or*—and *Two Upbuilding Discourses*" (PV 30).[159] So, Kierkegaard is in fact arguing that the title of *Either/Or* does not refer to the two parts of that book, but rather to both *Either/Or* and *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, a religious work published around three months later. The claim strikes one as implausible, even without evidence. It is at least hard to blame the readers whom the author scolds for applying the title of the voluminous work solely to that work, instead of taking into account a meagre devotional pamphlet published later the same year—and even signed by a different author. Unsurprisingly, Fenger does not find any confirmation of the narrative that Kierkegaard tries to advance—and he points out the obvious: "the thesis that the literary production is religious from start to finish" raises the questions of why Kierkegaard did not include the properly religious element in *Either/Or*—which seems to have been in the pipelines for a decade—and if he wanted to place it in a separate work, why he did not have the two works published "simultaneously," which then would have been "the only consistent thing."[160] Such seeming misrepresentation of the past arguably demonstrates that the activity of imposing meaning retrospectively has sometimes more to do with creative falsification than discovery—a fresh narrative is imposed on the past and everything must be reshaped to uniformly fit the new Procrustean bed. Yet one thing that Fenger mentions should perhaps cause critics to hesitate before chastising

156 Fenger, *Kierkegaard, the Myths and Their Origins*, xiii.

157 Ibid., 2.

158 Ibid., 29.

159 In the Princeton University Press series, *Two Upbuilding Discourses* appears at the beginning of the volume *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (EUD), 1–48

160 Ibid., 28; see also e.g. 5 and 158–178.

Kierkegaard for the faulty jumble of *Point of View*: "The manuscript has not been preserved." Kierkegaard's brother, Bishop Peter, prepared the manuscript for publication posthumously and then it disappeared, "so one can only hope the good bishop has printed the whole of the material."[161] Moreover, one can only hope that nothing was altered or misrepresented. Fenger can justly be accused of rambling at times, but the best part of his research is the attention he draws to documents that are rarely cited in secondary literature, and if they are mentioned at all, it is more in the form of a hint than a direct reference. In fact, Fenger's role in Kierkegaardian scholarship is not dissimilar to the role of *Promotor Fidei* in Roman Catholicism, whose job is to scrutinise suggested canonisation. One such noteworthy document is Israel Levin's report on Kierkegaard. Levin was hired by Kierkegaard as a secretary in 1844 and served him as such until 1850. It is stated in Garff's biography that Levin's assistance was "not merely to serve as a copyist," but "also to take dictation."[162] He "generally came to Kierkegaard in the morning," according to Garff, so they spent much time together over a long period.[163] An excerpt of Levin's report appears in the following translation in Fenger's book:

> Whoever wishes to treat S. K's life should take care not to get burned, full as it is of contrasts, difficult as it is to get to the bottom of his character. He often refers to twofold reflection; all his speech was more than sevenfold reflection. He struggled to achieve clarity concerning himself, but he was pursued by every possible mood and was himself such a person of moods that he often made untrue statements, persuading himself that he spoke the truth. . . . Generally, he lived in a world of imagination and empty reflections which seized upon everything and transformed it in every possible way, examining it from all sides and reflecting upon it. He never understood himself, in his intellectual activity he sought nourishment for his infinite yearning. The idea itself was enough for him, he "imagined himself into" every sort of existence. . . . That is why he sought release in reveries and poetic images, and with his gift for language and his demonic imagination, the effect he achieved was astonishing. . . . His imagination was so vital that it seemed he saw pictures before his very eyes. It was as though he lived in a world of the spirit, and with a remarkable impropriety and eccentricity he could depict the most frightful things in a degree of vividness which was terrifying. . . . Everything about him consisted of inward emotions. His talk about a wild bachelor's life, about youthful sins, and so on can refer only to "sinning in the thought."[164]

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161 Ibid., 26–27.

162 Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, 288.

163 Ibid., 290.

164 Fenger, *Kierkegaard, the Myths and Their Origins*, 15–16. See also Steen Johansen, *Erindringer om Søren Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Steen Hasselbach, 1955); and Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, 291–2. The title of Levin's document is "Remarks concerning S. Kierkegaard 1858 and 1869." A selection of it appeared in the Danish weekly newspaper *Weekendavisen* in 1975.

It can of course be questioned how reliable Levin is as a source, but the account is in line with what one would have guessed, with regard to Kierkegaard's strengths as well as his weaknesses, both of which are rooted in the quality of his imagination.[165] Even if Levin's report is only partially true, it would be sufficient to avoid exegetical strategy that is centred on Kierkegaard's self-description. Recall that he compared himself at one point to a spider and his authorship to a spider's web. Such a web can be defined as a complex network of fine threads, which is not a bad description of the authorship. In such a context, the *Point of View* testimony is not the meaning of the entire web, but rather as an addition to it, spun with no less imagination than the rest of the silk. In the notes that accompany the *Point of View* writings, Kierkegaard employs another instructive analogy for his authorship, namely a Spanish river that is partly subterranean, so that the water runs beneath the surface and then re-emerges from the ground: "*Qua* author I am like the river Guadalquivir,[166] which at some place plunges underground" (PV 204).[167] In other words, the visibility changes although the river stays the same. The Kierkegaardian corpus is indeed both cohesive and multiform, like a stream that flows through channels of various sort. However, in line with the interpretive position that I have been advancing, the Kierkegaardian river might be best understood as entirely subterranean: all the works are by Kierkegaard, but in a way, they are also all pseudonymous, indirect, masked, with a meaning hidden from plain view, perpetually underground—and this applies also to the autobiographical narrative. Remarkably, Kierkegaard considered for a while to have his testimony published pseudonymously (PV 229). In the end, he settled for an alias of a sort, his stage name: Kierkegaard.

1.3 Vocation and creative impulse

Now, after the assessment of the authorial testimonies, I will seek to establish Kierkegaard's vocation as an author and his defining feature as a philosopher, that is to say, what feature captures his essential and original contribution to intellectual history. Slavoj Žižek has used the term "creative impulse" for such a defining feature and I will adopt that term.[168] With

165 It is not surprising that a philosopher who gets particularly excited about the idea of "actuality" is someone whose life is stripped of actuality, so that most of what happens to him takes place in his head.

166 The river is always spelled as "Guadalquibir" by Kierkegaard; "v" and "b" are pronounced exactly alike in Spanish. In their translation, Howard and Edna Hong preserve the spelling every time but follow it with '[*sic*]'. Here it is preferred to update the spelling. In any case, Kierkegaard is confusing Spanish rivers, the one with the quality that he describes is not Guadalquivir, but a river called Guadiana.

167 See e.g. also PV 202: "It was a sound idea: to stop my productivity by once again using a pseudonym. Like the river Guadalquivir—this simile appeals to me very much."

168 Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 11.

regard to the vocation, the most appropriate title to attribute to him is arguably one that he himself uses in the following passage:

> Whole volumes could be written about [the martyr], even by me, a kind of poet and philosopher, to say nothing of the one who is coming, the philosopher-poet or the poet-philosopher, who, in addition, will have seen close at hand the object of my presentiments at a distance, will have seen accomplished what I only dimly imagine will be carried out sometime in a distant future. (PV 282)[169]

He first refers to himself as "a kind of poet and philosopher" and then he invokes a future successor who will use the material he has provided to accomplish something—and this future successor is referred to as "philosopher-poet" or "poet-philosopher." The term he uses for the successor seems to be a condensed reiteration of the title he chooses for himself, so it can be inferred that he is calling himself a "poet-philosopher." Recall that one of the tenets of the moderate reading, which I incorporated into my moderate theatrical reading, is that Kierkegaard is essentially a poet-philosopher of a certain kind. Recall also that in relation to my criticism of the *Point of View* testimonial reading I drew attention to Kierkegaard's statement in another note that he is essentially a poet. In commenting on that statement, Schönbaumsfeld points out that his identification as a poet, in such a context, "does not imply that Kierkegaard is a poet in the ordinary sense of that term," but rather, he "calls himself a poet rather than a philosopher, in order to distinguish himself from the systematicians such as Hegel and the German Idealists."[170] In other words, Kierkegaard's claimed vocation as a poet is synonymous to being a philosopher of a sort. In addition to seeking to contrast his philosophy to metaphysical system-building, he sought to emphasise his borderline vocation between philosophy and art in the broad sense, as I discussed in relation to my account of the moderate theatrical reading. Moreover, there is a sense in which Kierkegaard wanted to turn poets into philosophers of a sort, as is evident from his criticism of H. C. Andersen for lacking a life-view (EPW 76).[171] That criticism is also reflected in *Concept of Irony* in which Kierkegaard stated the necessity of having a fundamental life-view, or a "totality-view of the world," through which one becomes a "master over irony" in one's "individual existence," which according to him entails becoming "a philosopher to a certain degree" (CI 325). Finally, the selection of Socrates as his only analogy indicates

169 JP III 2649 (*Pap.* IX B 63:13) *n.d.*, 1848. It must be pointed out that although the note has been published as part of the supplement of the *Point of View* volume in the Princeton series, it is not part of the texts that I have associated with the *Point of View* narrative.

170 Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres*, 66 n54.

171 See discussion in §1.2.1.

Kierkegaard's stronger link to philosophy than poetry or prose-writing in a strict sense. Therefore, the term "poet-philosopher" is suitable for his vocation, as Kierkegaard himself seems to suggest. When Louis Mackey calls Kierkegaard "a kind of poet" he is *de facto* referring to a poet-philosopher of this sort, as is suggested by his description of Kierkegaard's task of directing "the reader to supply the necessary personal identity," namely "his own," as well as by maintaining that "the form of Kierkegaard's writings insinuates their content: subjectivity, inwardness, the passionate appropriation of objective uncertainty, is the only truth possible for an existing individual."[172] Likewise, Michael Strawser claims that Kierkegaard "stands for a turning point" in the history of philosophy, from an objective systematic approach to a subjective fragmentary one.[173] So, both Mackie and Strawser emphasise the subjective dimension, the former focusing on the personal choice in life that cannot be delegated and the latter focusing on the contrast to objectivity in the sense of rejecting that "philosophy can be or should try to be scientific."[174] I have integrated such subjectivity to my moderate theatrical reading and I have occasionally referred to Kierkegaard as a subjective thinker in this chapter. The stage director in the Kierkegaardian theatre is a subjective thinker who imaginatively explores the human potential—and a theatrical reading of a philosopher is implicitly opposed to a scientific reading. Yet, to depict the Dane merely as a subjective thinker is insufficient; the portrait is half-drawn. At the end of the day, it is hard to investigate the Kierkegaardian corpus without the sense that a truth about the human condition is being communicated that goes beyond the message that individuals should cultivate themselves according to their natural constitution or that they have to make some choice about the direction of their lives. Thus, the magic of the Kierkegaardian theatre is not simply to bring the message "decide who you will become," but also to indirectly advance a standard of self-becoming in light of observations about the human condition, even though the standard does not constitute a teleological system. There is more to Kierkegaard than advocacy for ethical self-examination and critical thinking: he is introducing a conceptual framework in which important philosophical views are imbedded. In order to illustrate the point, I will address the epigraph that I chose for this chapter, in which Kierkegaard stresses that he occupies a border territory—and where he claims his authorship to be historically relevant:

172 Mackie, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*, 255.

173 Strawser, *Both/And*, xvi.

174 Ibid., xxxiv.

> I have had too much to do with the ethical to be a poet, but I am too much of poet to be a truth-witness; I am a *confinium* [border territory] in between. I am, to allude to the highest, neither the one awaited nor the forerunner of the one awaited, but a prescient figure who with categorical exactitude has been related to the future of history, to the turn that should be made and that will become the future of history. PV 278[175]

The term "truth-witness" is a direct translation of the term Kierkegaard uses, *Sandhedsvidne*. The Danish term (as well as the English parallel) connotes that the truth in question is of a religious sort. In other words, Kierkegaard is rejecting being regarded either simply as a poet, on the one hand, or as an apostle of Christian truth, on the other hand, while claiming to be a "prophet" of a different sort, namely a thinker who "with categorical exactitude" has relevance for "the future of history," or a philosopher of historical significance. The question I need to address is what content Kierkegaard regarded to be his significant contribution to history—or, as I refer to this contribution, the nature of his creative impulse as a philosopher. To begin with, it is worth considering whether his creative impulse was Christian truth of some sort. The argument that such truth was his contribution to intellectual history receives support from the fact that the majority of his works were either straightforwardly Christian or bore some relation to Christianity. However, if his creative impulse relates to Christianity, his rejection of being a religious truth-witness suggests that his Christian message does not consist in some new revelation, but is rather reconcilable with his essential vocation as a poet-philosopher. However, there is an unsurmountable problem inherent in identifying Christian truth as Kierkegaard's core philosophical contribution. The problem is that the Christianity he is expressing must be somehow enhanced or innovative in order to constitute a historical "turn that should be made," even though Kierkegaard without doubt considered himself to be capturing the true nature of the faith. If there is no innovation, then Kierkegaard would be restating the old message of the Church fathers, which is hardly philosophically ground-breaking, even if the communication of it is novel and ingenious. But if his message is somehow an innovative conception of Christianity, that is to say traditional Christianity + X, then it is the innovation that is ground-breaking, namely X. As I have established, this X must be connected to Kierkegaard's vocation as a poet-philosopher, so it cannot simply constitute the idiosyncrasies of the Pietist milieu that his father brought him up in. The defining feature of the Pietist theology was its subjective approach to the faith, which Kierkegaard

[175] Supplement to PV; from draft of "Three Notes" (*Pap.* IX B 64 *n.d.*, 1848). It must be kept in mind that although the journal entry is published in the *Point of View* volume it can and should be separated from what I've labelled as the *Point of View* narrative, because it was kept out of the writings that make up that narrative, so that its status as evidence should be regarded as the same as any other journal entry.

adopted. The key aspects of his intriguing conception of Christianity—including the subject-to-subject relation to God (CUP-I 199–200), Christ as a "prototype" to imitate (PC 238), Christianity as an "existence-communication" rather than a doctrine (CUP-I 380), emphasis on symbolic death and rebirth (FSE 75–77), and centrality of altruistic love (WL 54)—all belong to his theological inheritance rather than counting as innovation of any sort. To some degree, Kierkegaard radicalised these sectarian features with the claimed purpose of capturing New Testament Christianity. However, the radicalisation of Pietist theological features can hardly be what Kierkegaard is referring to when he alludes to the historical significance of the message. Even if the X I am searching for has to do with Christianity it must be something else—something philosophical and ground-breaking.

However, the options are not many. Possibly, the solution might have something to do with important concepts in his vocabulary, such as anxiety and despair. However, such concepts appear to be in a supportive role rather than being at the core of what he sought to express. A good starting point in the search for the creative impulse is to consider the observation of Pattison that "some of Kierkegaard's headline categories—subjectivity, the ethical, the self, passion, character and so on—suggest that he had important interest in at least one substantive philosophical question, namely, the question as to what it is to be a self or person."[176] Accordingly, the enquiry should focus on what substantial aspect of subjectivity, selfhood, ethics, et cetera, constitutes the content in question. It is submitted that the only viable answer—the missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle—is Kierkegaard's rejection of both Platonic recollection and Hegelian mediation in favour of his category of repetition (*Gjentagelse*). This is the position of Deleuze and Žižek, as well as Stephen Crites and John Caputo, to mention a few.[177] The writings of Crites, and Caputo offer particularly valuable insights into Kierkegaard's category of repetition, as will become evident in chapter four.[178]

My purpose by identifying Kierkegaard's creative impulse is to determine between ways to approach his conception of self-becoming. It is my contention that repetition is at the heart of his conception of self-becoming, so that one becomes oneself through repetition. The

176 Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 8.

177 It should also be noted that Mackie, whose *Kind of Poet* I cited earlier in relation to Kierkegaard as a subjective poet-philosopher, eventually became captivated by the idea of repetition—and included a long essay on the topic in his subsequent collection. Mackie, *Points of View*, 68–101. The essay first appeared in *Kierkegaard and Literature: Irony, Repetition, and Criticism*, ed. Ronald Schleifer and Robert Markley (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984). However, there is not much to be gained from Mackie's essay, as he had by that time appropriated the worst aspects of Derridean deconstruction. Deleuze arrived at the idea of repetition through his theatrical reading—which I addressed in connection to my version of that reading—but his account is not of great benefit to us either, as his account is too heavily mixed with his own Spinozian agenda. See §1.1.

178 Useful commentary is also offered by scholars such as Robert Perkins, George Stack, Jamie Ferreira, and Jon Stewart.

category of repetition is complex and multifaceted—and I will not provide an adequate account of it until chapter four. At this point, it is sufficient to state a few facts about repetition. The concept can be traced back to *Either/Or* and the posthumously published *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*,[179] but its major exposition is in the work that bears its name, *Repetition*, by the pseudonym Constantin Constantius, as I mentioned in my account of the moderate theatrical interpretation. Repetition is an existential category that involves criticism of metaphysics, at least metaphysical thinking of a certain sort.[180] One fundamental aspect of repetition has to do with how one relates to time: it is contrasted to the existential mode of recollection, which is predominantly orientated towards the past, and to the existential mode of hope, which is predominantly orientated towards the future. As Pattison puts it, "recollection must give way to repetition, the striving in time to attain selfhood in and by the ever-renewed / repeated commitment to the concrete moment."[181] The orientation of repetition is towards the present, yet in a way that is forward-facing rather than backward-facing. The present is related to Kierkegaard's concept of the "instant," which is translated as the "moment" by the Hongs.[182] The instant has a variety of meanings in Kierkegaard's vocabulary, both positive and negative, and repetition is intertwined with its positive sense, as will be explained in chapter two and four. If we take the example of friendship, recollection dwells in a memory of a past friend, hope dwells in the prospect of a future friend, but repetition conveys the friend that you call every week. The encounter with the friend will never exactly repeat itself in its worldly manifestation, and that is not what the idea of repetition signifies—but the spirit of the friendship is repeated in every encounter and the friendship is indeed forged through such repetition. Thus, the ideality of the friendship is approximately made concrete in the actuality of temporal existence through repetition. In contemporary popular culture preoccupation with the moment often goes hand in hand with negativity towards the temporal, where the notion that time is an illusion is often claimed, and pure being is preferred to becoming.[183] This stance in popular culture is built on a far-reaching metaphysical tradition, both in the West and the

179 *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est* (DO), trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1985). The work is included in the same volume as *Philosophical Fragments* in the Princeton series. Hereafter: *De Omnibus*.

180 I use the term "existential" as a synonym to "ethical," in a broad sense. The sole reason why the latter term is not used in this context is to avoid confusion with the ethical sphere and the ethical mode of existence, which refer to ethics in a narrower sense. In other words, the "existential" is synonymous to ethics in its original meaning in antiquity, which centred upon the question of how one should live. Not only ethicists are concerned with that question in Kierkegaard's scheme of things: aesthetes and people of faith can also have such concerns, although their answers differ.

181 George Pattison, *Agnosis: Theology in the Void* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1996), 102.

182 The instant will be discussed in §2.3.6.

183 This is a theme in self-help literature; a good example is a very popular book by Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999).

East. These trends cannot be ignored as irrelevant because they have deeply infiltrated culture, explicitly or implicitly, since the period that Karl Jaspers referred to as the "Axial Age," namely the period from 8th to 3rd century BCE.[184] So, Roberto Unger cannot be accused of tilting at windmills when he declares time to be real and claims that "there is no truth more important to acknowledge if we are to understand ourselves and our place in the world":

> The reality of time is not a meaningless platitude; it is a revolutionary proposition, incompatible with much of traditional science and philosophy. In particular, it is anathema to the perennial philosophy which takes as a core tenet the unreality of time. For divine and ultimate being, and for the mind as the mind participates in such being, all events in the world are, according to that philosophy, simultaneous. There is only an eternal now.[185]

Unger's "revolutionary proposition" is forcefully reflected in the category of repetition. He singles out "perennial philosophy" for influencing the notion that time is not real—and the iconic perennial philosopher is Plato. What perennialism signifies for Unger is of the same vein as what Plato means for his colleague in pragmatic jurisprudence, Richard Posner:

> Plato turned Homer, the pre-Socratic philosophers, and the sophists upside down by celebrating stasis over flux, the permanent over the contingent, peace over struggle, knowing over doing, logic over coping, abstract divinity over naturalistic gods, universals over particulars, abstract reason over practical intelligence (and thus philosophy over rhetoric), truth over opinion, reality over appearance, principle over expedience, unity over diversity, objectivity over subjectivity, philosophy over poetry, and rule by philosophers over popular rule.[186]

Both Kierkegaard and Unger would without doubt quarrel with some of the contrasts Posner makes, resulting from his fervent Nietzscheanism, not least his preference for "naturalistic gods" and his flirt with the warlike over the peaceful, but they would still understand his dislike for "abstract divinity" and his praise of "struggle" in the context of striving and overcoming obstacles instead of avoiding them.[187] Moreover, Kierkegaard and Unger do not outlaw the eternal, as Posner does, but the dimension of the eternal should, according to them, infiltrate temporality. If we keep that difference in mind and concentrate on the basic proposition of the passage rather than controversial details, then it captures well what is ground-

184 Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010/1949), 2–6.

185 Roberto Unger, *The Self Awakened: Pragmatism Unbound* (Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press, 2007), 81.

186 Richard Posner, *Law, Pragmatism, and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 29.

187 The largest difference between Kierkegaard and Unger, however, has to do with views on "popular rule." Unger is an advocate for radical democracy while Kierkegaard was famously sceptical of democracy.

breaking about the category of repetition: its radical affirmation of temporal reality is simultaneously an affirmation of genuine flux, namely movement and change, in contrast to stasis or mere organic development; affirmation of freedom in contrast to necessity; affirmation of individual particularity in contrast to uniformity, and affirmation of becoming in contrast to pure being. Indeed, one becomes oneself through repetition, as I will argue throughout this dissertation, and one's self-identification is forged through repetition—through the identity affixed to repeated actions as well through the internalisation of ideals that occurs through repeating the actions in which ideals are approximately made concrete in time. So, one becomes what one repeats, while one's improvised self-narrative is likely to be either delusional or spurious, as Kierkegaard knew well and as was *de facto* expressed through the category of repetition, in spite of his own dubious *Point of View* narrative, or perhaps it could be said that he indirectly demonstrated that proposition by way of that false narrative.

There is a compelling argument to be made for determining Kierkegaard's creative impulse to be the category of repetition—in particular the following six reasons:

(1) The category of repetition is introduced in the work *Repetition* by Constantius as a ground-breaking philosophical notion of historical significance:

> [T]his question will play a very important role in modern philosophy, for *repetition* is a crucial expression for what "recollection" was to the Greeks. Just as they taught that all knowing is a recollecting, modern philosophy will teach that all life is repetition. The only modern philosopher who has had an intimation of this is Leibniz. Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward. (R 131)

(2) The category of repetition is significant for the above-mentioned "substantive philosophical question" that above all else occupied Kierkegaard according to Pattison, namely what it is to be a self—and it is indeed decisive to ethical subjectivity:

> If one does not have the category of recollection or of repetition, all life dissolves into an empty, meaningless noise. Recollection is the ethnical [*ethniske*] view of life, repetition the modern; repetition is the *interest* [*Interesse*] of metaphysics, and also the interest upon which metaphysics comes to grief; repetition is the watchword [*Løsnet*] in every ethical view; repetition is *conditio sine qua non* [the indispensable condition] for every issue of dogmatics. (R 149)

(3) The category of repetition is partly consumed by Kierkegaard's gradually developing conception of Christianity—and arguably constitutes the innovative conception that I postulated, so that the X which I was searching for is the idea of repetition. In this manner the evidence for Christian truth as the creative impulse can be turned into evidence for repetition, in addition to explaining why the concept of repetition does not appear more prominently than it does in the published works and the journals, as the Hongs point out:

> Both [the work] *Repetition* and the concept of repetition are sparsely represented in the journals and papers. The paucity of entries, despite the importance of the work and the concept, may be accounted for by assuming, as do the Danish editors of the *Papirer*, that the extant collection of journal entries and papers is incomplete and by taking into account Kierkegaard's use of "spontaneity after reflection" and "faith" as synonyms for essential repetition.[188]

(4) The category of repetition is still not wholly consumed by Christianity, but stands as a factor outside of it as well—and is arguably capable of finding expression in an aesthetic mode of existence. Thus, the dialectical quality of the authorship can be considered to be preserved in a deep sense, so that there is an element of pluralism inherent in it, in line with a point that Perkins articulates:

> Constantin and some commentators lament that the young man experiences only an aesthetic repetition and does not arrive at the religious mode of existence, that is, that he remains in the aesthetic mode of life. Such a pious remark is factually correct, but it also misses something vital in Kierkegaard's view of the place, function, and variety of repetition in human existence. The real hopefulness in Kierkegaard's understanding of our existential situation is that we obtain ourselves again in various sorts of ways, in various modes of existence, and that the modes of existence do not necessarily all follow the same course.[189]

(5) The category of repetition has had a huge impact on elite intellectual circles, in spite of being somewhat incompletely articulated by Kierkegaard, which partly necessitates creative construction through interpretation. However, the unfinished quality is in line with an aspect of the meaning of indirect communication, namely the participation of the reader in shaping concepts. Moreover, the incomplete quality matches Kierkegaard's comment in relation to his successor, namely the poet-philosopher, who "will have seen close at hand the object of [Kierkegaard's] presentiments at a distance," and who will have seen the fulfilment of what

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188 Howard Hong and Edna Hong, introduction to *Repetition*, xxxiii.

189 Robert L. Perkins, introduction to the section on *Repetition* in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, *Volume 6*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 197.

Kierkegaard "only dimly imagined" (PV 282). Although the journal entries on repetition are not many, they tend to highlight the fundamental value of the concept for the entire authorship, including an entry from 1853, in which Kierkegaard states that "repetition is the category about which it will revolve":

> Yes, "Either/Or"—that is where the battle is, and therefore my first words are: Either/Or. And that which is in *Either/Or* I can say of myself: I am an enigmatic being on whose brow stands Either/Or. But how this is to be understood could not be seen at once; much had to be arranged first. For this an entire productivity *uno tenore* [without interruption], an entire productivity nevertheless related to a repetition: all must be taken up again. Therefore the work was under so much pressure, was so hasty—which local sagacity regarded as very foolish—because all pointed to a repetition, as it therefore stands in the little book *Repetition*: Repetition is the category about which it will revolve. (R 329)[190]

On the same point—and in order to highlight the impact the category of repetition has had—the person who is commonly referred to as the most influential literary critic of the 20th century, Northrop Frye, was in no doubt that the incomplete category of repetition is the most remarkable contribution of Kierkegaard to intellectual history:

> Kierkegaard's very brief but extraordinary book *Repetition* is the only study I know of the psychological contrast between a past-directed causality and a future-oriented typology. The mere attempt to repeat a past experience will lead only to disillusionment, but here is another type of repetition which is the Christian antithesis (or complement) of Platonic recollection, and which finds its focus in the biblical promise "Behold, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). Kierkegaard's "repetition" is certainly derived from, and to my mind identifiable with, the forward-moving typological thinking of the Bible. Perhaps his book is so brief because he lived too early to grasp the full significance of his own argument, as typological rhetoric was then only beginning to take on many of its new and remarkable modern developments.[191]

(6) Finally, the category of repetition is displayed as the alternative to not only Platonic recollection but also Hegelian mediation—and because so much of Kierkegaard's energy is spent on criticism of the Hegelian system, it is highly likely that his creative impulse is to be found within such a context:

> Repetition is the new category that will be discovered. If one knows anything of modern philosophy and is not entirely ignorant of Greek philosophy, one will readily see that this category precisely explains the relation between the Eleatics and Heraclitus, and that

190 Suppl.; *Pap.* X6 B 326 *n.d.*, 1853.

191 Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (New York, NY: Harcourt, 1982), 82. See also Perkins, introduction to the section on *Repetition* in vol. 6 of *International Kierkegaard Commentary,* 82. Typology is a classification according to general type.

> repetition proper is what has mistakenly been called mediation. It is incredible how much flurry has been made in Hegelian philosophy over mediation and how much foolish talk has enjoyed honour and glory under this rubric. (R 148)

There is a lot to unpack in the cited passages, but such discussion will have to wait until chapter four. At this point, I will restrict myself to addressing the last passage on the opposition to Hegelian mediation and explain it in terms of Kierkegaard's creative impulse. Hegelian mediation is viewed by Kierkegaard as a false alternative to the flawed mindset of Platonic recollection, while his concept of repetition is the true alternative to recollection. Thus, Hegelian mediation and Kierkegaardian repetition are competing ideas to replace the doctrine of recollection, which for Kierkegaard symbolically signifies both the existential mode of recollection and the perennial metaphysics that I accounted for earlier. Kierkegaard begins the work *Repetition* humorously by invoking an ancient story where Diogenes opposed the theory of the two Eleatics, Parmenides and Zeno, who rejected movement and change as logical contradictions and consequently deemed people's sense-perception as illusory: "When the Eleatics denied motion, Diogenes, as everyone knows, came forward as an opponent. He literally did come forward, because he did not say a word but merely paced back and forth a few times, thereby assuming that he had sufficiently refuted them" (R 131). Kierkegaard sides with Diogenes and continues his altercation with the Eleatics by suggesting an alternative to the perennial metaphysics according to which movement and change are rejected. The representative of the Eleatics in that altercation is their most influential proponent, Plato. His doctrine of recollection, in its original form, can be defined in terms of the metaphysical epistemology of "innate knowledge," anticipating the Cartesian notion of such knowledge, yet not identical to it.[192] According to the doctrine, human beings possess all true knowledge through their eternal souls, even though they tend not to be mindful of it. Therefore, the activity of discovering true knowledge is essentially an activity of recollecting an eternal truth—of an ideal realm or an ideal past—which has been forgotten, so that people can become aware of truth that has been dormant in them. The recollection takes place through reason. The doctrine sounds of course fantastical when stated plainly, but for Kierkegaard it symbolically conveys the intellectual stance of perennial metaphysics. People in the existence mode of recollection are consumed by recovery of an ideal past—perpetually attempting to restore what they conceive to be an

[192] For an account of recollection in Plato's dialogues, see in particular *Philebus* in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M Cooper, trans. (of *Philebus*) Dorothea Frede (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 422 (§34b–c); *Meno* in *Meno and Other Dialogues*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 123 (§85c); *Phaedo*, trans. David Gallop (Oxford: OUP, 1993), 20–21 (§72d–73b); and *Phaedrus*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 32–33 (249b–c).

organic being of the past, either individually in terms of authenticity of simpler times, or socially in terms of institutional excellence, of, for example, a religious or political sort. Thus, the mode of recollection prefers the certainty of the ideal over the uncertainty of temporal actuality and the flux of becoming. This is a feature of metaphysics that Nietzsche criticised by comparing it to the Egyptian practice of making mummies: "You ask me about the idiosyncrasies of philosophers? . . . There is their lack of historical sense, their hatred of even the idea of becoming, their Egyptianism. They think they are doing a thing *honour* when they dehistoricize it, *sub specie aeterni*—when they make a mummy of it."[193] Ironically, the lack of historical sense that Nietzsche brings up is a valid objection against the existence mode of recollection, in spite of its orientation towards the past. The opposite of that mode, as I have mentioned, is the future-orientation of hope. Although the category of repetition is placed in between those two modes, in the present, it has more in common with hope, because in the mode of repetition one proceeds forwards, towards the future, and the ideal one strives to manifest is in the future, which explains a point that Caputo is keen to stress: "Recollection takes one look at the flux and retreats. Repetition, on the other hand, presses forward. It has the courage for the flux, the will to press ahead. It knows the prize lies ahead and is given only to those who fight the good fight, who can forge their identity amidst the ravages of time."[194]

The closely-related notions of mediation and sublation, or *Vermittelung* and *Aufhebung* respectively in German, were put forward by Hegel in the context of signifying philosophical transformation away from the stance of perennial metaphysics towards a philosophy of becoming in which movement and change are approved. Mediation is used for a union of two terms in the third, such as the union of universality and the particularity in individuality. "It is through mediation that movement takes place," as Jon Stewart explains: "Individual concepts generate their opposites, and then these pairs of categories are mediated, thus producing new concepts. Thus, being produces its opposite, nothing, and the two opposites are united in a third concept, becoming. In this way there is a movement from one concept to the next."[195] Sublation is a slightly narrower concept. The verb for sublation in German, *aufheben*, literary means "to pick up" or "to lift up," but it also has connotations indicating

193 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 45 ("Reason in Philosophy," §1).

194 John D. Caputo, "Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and the Foundering of Metaphysics," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Volume 6: Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, ed. Robert L Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 208.

195 Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 293. See also e.g. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010/1812–16), 81 (§21.93–4) and 89 (§21.103–4).

preservation and suspension. An element X is sublated in an element Y when X is decontextualised, so that instead of standing by itself as self-sufficient, it belongs to Y, a wider frame of reference of which it is not the first principle. After the event of sublimation, X is degraded from an absolute status in its own realm to a relative status in the realm of Y. The sublated element has its place in Y, but we can also say that it has been put in its place; it is still important but not all-important. In this way, sublation is meant to signify the progressive movement of the world spirit. However, Kierkegaard is keen to point out that the Hegelian system of mediation and sublation displays the logic of abstract categories, resulting in a necessary outcome within a system, without any genuine freedom and movement. In order to cast light on Kierkegaard's claim that the Hegelian system presents false movement it is useful to note the broad meaning of Hegel's concept of logic: it is extended to cover the mechanism of natural or immanent systems, including biological ones, so for instance the organic growth of a plant follows certain logic because it is in line with natural laws, to invoke an analogy that Hegel himself makes:

> Because that which is implicit comes into existence, it certainly passes into change, yet it remains one and the same, for the whole process is dominated by it. The plant, for example, does not lose itself in mere indefinite change. From the germ much is produced when at first nothing was to be seen; but the whole of what is brought forth, if not developed, is yet hidden and ideally contained within itself. The principle of this projection into existence is that the germ cannot remain merely implicit, but is impelled towards development, since it presents the contradiction of being only implicit and yet not desiring so to be. But this coming without itself has an end in view; its completion fully reached, and its previously determined end is the fruit or produce of the germ, which causes a return to the first condition.[196]

So, Kierkegaard is not merely stating the obvious, for instance, that there is neither freedom nor movement within the framework of pure mathematics, but he is rejecting that such organic development constitutes genuine movement—and Hegelian mediation and sublation in the human sphere is viewed as a speculative extension of such organic development, thus not making room for actual freedom and presenting false movement in the sense that what occurs is merely an unfolding of some principle that lies within the subject from the beginning. In this way, Hegel does not manage to break away from the doctrine of recollection: the task is still to uncover some innate truth. For proper movement to take place, in Kierkegaard's scheme of things, the chain of cause and effect relations needs to be broken—and he

[196] G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 1 of 3, trans. E. S. Haldane (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 22.

applies the term transcendence for such rupture of an immanent system.[197] In a posthumously published reply to Heiberg's review of *Repetition*, Kierkegaard, still as Constantius, explains his criticism of mediation—and his point is easily understood in light of the context that I have provided:

> In our day some have gone so far that they have even wanted to have movement in logic. There they have called repetition "mediation." But movement is a concept that logic simply cannot support. Mediation, therefore, must be understood in relation to immanence. Thus understood, mediation may not again be used at all in the sphere of freedom, where the subsequent always emerges—by virtue not of an immanence but of a transcendence. Therefore, the word "mediation" has contributed to a misunderstanding in logic, because it allowed a concept of movement to be attached to it. In the sphere of freedom, the word "mediation" has again done damage, because, coming from logic, it helped to make the transcendence of movement illusory. In order to prevent this error or this dubious compromise between the logical and freedom, I have thought that "repetition" could be used in the sphere of freedom. (R 308)[198]

The point is continued in *Postscript* where Climacus argues that while a "logical system can be given . . . a system of existence cannot be given" (CUP–I 109). However, the "theory of the stages" that is often attributed to Kierkegaard, sometimes based on the spurious *Point of View* testimony, is one such Hegelian system. According to the theory of the stages the three existence-spheres—the aesthetic one, the ethical one, and the religious one—are a framework of teleologically progressive stages, which constitute the development of the individual self. The transition from the aesthetic sphere to the ethical one is considered to be an advancement and the same applies to the transition from the ethical sphere to the religious one. Thus, the framework is a system of existence, progressing towards a religious *telos*. Furthermore, a common version of the theory, allegedly supported by Judge William's account in *Either/Or*, stipulates that aesthetic qualities are preserved in a relativised form in the ethical sphere and that both aesthetic and ethical qualities are preserved in such a way in the religious sphere, or alternatively, that aesthetic qualities are not properly preserved in the ethical sphere, but that they are sufficiently brought back in the religious sphere, which thus unites the qualities of all three spheres. Merold Westphal is an example of a scholar who adheres to a version of the theory of the stages—and in light of my account, it is not surprising that he maintains that the transitions between stages should structurally be understood in context

[197] If the causal chain is not broken, an act is necessitated by previous causes instead of being free.

[198] *Pap.* IV B 117 *n.d.*, 1843–44.

of a Hegelian *Aufhebung*.[199] Westphal's is simply carrying the theory of the stages to its logical outcome.[200] Responding critically to the theory, Harvie Ferguson points out that by ordering the spheres "according to a developmental scheme, driven by a process of *aufheben*, in which the lower is preserved in being elevated into a higher relation," it is hard "to avoid turning Kierkegaard into a Hegelian," so that the authorship resembles "a psychological re-casting of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*."[201] Likewise, David Kangas points out that the theory of the stages effectively turn Kierkegaard into a Hegelian idealist.[202] So, the theory of the stages turns Kierkegaard into a Hegelian advocate of an existential system, contrary to what I have established with regard to Kierkegaard's creative impulse. Kangas makes a valuable observation relevant to my anti-systematic and non-teleological reading:

> [O]ne has to look beyond the apparent teleology of the stages. If the religious acquires priority in Kierkegaard's texts—and no doubt it does—this is not because the subject realizes therein the implicit telos of its existence. On the contrary, it is because the subject finally discovers the representational or egological status of every telos. A telos is something inevitably posited or mediated by consciousness; it has the ontological status of representation. Yet the religious is the name for the referral of the subject to, and its holding itself open for, the infinite beginning, the instant of coming-into-existence, which it can neither posit nor recollect. It coincides with the subject's impossibility to take itself as origin, ground, absolute beginning (as still happens in both the aesthetic and the ethical). This is exactly why the texts (especially *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*) link the religious to the "impossible," to "the ordeal," and refuse to regard it as the *outcome* of a process for which the subject constitutes the origin. If one insists upon teleology, then one could say that the telos of human existence, the point at which it becomes religious,

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199 Merold Westphal, *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1996), e.g. 26 and 146. See discussion in §3.3.3. Westphal, originally presented his argument in "Kierkegaard's Teleological Suspension of Religiousness B," which was published in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*, eds. George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1992), 110-129. See also Merold Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Religiousness C. A Defence," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2004): 546.

200 I'll present the existence-spheres as non-teleological categories in §3.3.3. For criticism of Westphal, see Henry B. Piper (2004), "Kierkegaard's Non-Dialectical Dialectic or That Kierkegaard is not Hegelian," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2004): 497–517; and Jack Mulder, Jr., "Re-radicalizing Kierkegaard: An Alternative to Religiousness C in Light of an Investigation into the Teleological Suspension of the Ethical," *Continental Philosophy Review* 35 (2002): 303–324. See also Ronald R. Johnson, "The Logic of Leaping: Kierkegaardian Use of Hegelian Sublation," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1997): 155–170; Justin Sands, "The Concept of Aufhebung in the thought of Merold Westphal: Appropriation and Recontextualisation," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 76, no. 1 (2015): 49–68.

201 Harvie Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity: Søren Kierkegaard's Religious Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1995), 114.

202 David J. Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant: On Beginnings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 7: "[The stages] take on an entirely Hegelian form: they are supposed to trace a teleological movement from immediacy (the aesthetic) through mediation (the ethical) to a mediated immediacy (the religious, a "later immediacy"). Moreover, they are typically regarded as what a subject *necessarily* has to progress through if it is to realize the truth of its being. Only the religious subject is an authentic subject. The religious is thus supposed to constitute both the arché and the telos of human existence.

> is the abandonment of every telos. The abandonment of every telos is the *absolute* telos. One possesses only in agreeing not to possess.[203]

If understood appropriately, this remarkable passage arguable addresses an important aspect of Kierkegaard's philosophy: there is no end-goal woven into the fabric of human existence—yet such realisation constitutes a subjective advancement, on the grounds of which one breaks away from a natural causal chain of events and properly faces one's contingency, freedom and responsibility.[204] Thus, the immediate vitality of one's biological or organic being and development is radically ruptured and to various degrees replaced by subjective awareness and the unfolding of possibilities. In *Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis refers to such confrontation in terms of facing the *Afgrund*—the abyssal ground or the ultimate void, although the meaning is partly lost in the standard translation:

> In actuality, no one ever sank so deep that he could not sink deeper, and there may be one or many who sank deeper. But he who sank in possibility—his eye became dizzy, his eye became confused, so he could not grasp the measuring stick that Tom, Dick, and Harry hold out as saving straw to one sinking; his ear was closed so he could not hear what the market price of men was in his own day, did not hear that he was just as good as the majority. He sank absolutely, but then in turn he emerged from the depth of the abyss lighter than all the troublesome and terrible things in life. (CA 158)

The last sentence is crucial: *Han sank absolut, men da dukkede han atter op fra Afgrundens Dyb lettere end alt det Besværende og Forfærdende i Livet.* The bewildering confrontation with the abyssal ground can happen in every mode of existence—and it is probably more common in the aesthetic one than any other—but it occurs on the verge of self-destructive nihilism and egotism. Detachment from one's organic context can easily lead to either meaningless gloom or self-absorption, according to which one views oneself as an isolated link, detached from any chain; the beginning and the end of everything. What is at stake is to constructively "emerge from the depth of the abyss." Kangas is correct in reading Kierkegaard as communicating that ultimately only the religious mode is equipped with a horizon of meaning in which such emergence is facilitated without self-absorption—and where a new chain of groundedness is effectively formed. Although there is no end-goal woven into the fabric of the world, people can of course still have goals, including end-goals, but they result from subjective decisions rather than objective discoveries. A decision can be well reasoned, but it cannot be reduced to an outcome of logical mechanism: in an important

[203] Ibid., 8.

[204] This aspect will be associated with the category of repetition in chapter four.

sense, such mechanism is ruptured through the emergence of human agency. This leads us to Kierkegaard's concept of the leap, "which is essentially at home in the realm of freedom"—and which signifies the rupture to which I am referring.[205] The Kierkegaardian leap is absent in the process of mediation, but importantly present in the alternative category of repetition. I will return to this topic in chapter three.

What I have established about Kierkegaard's creative impulse is decisive with regard to the meaning of his notion of self-becoming. The notion is often explained in terms of self-realisation or self-actualisation in a manner that is more akin to the category of mediation than the category of repetition. If one's approach to Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming starts off on the wrong foot, everything that follows becomes wrong-headed. It is not uncommon in scholarship on Kierkegaard to interpret him into the Hegelian system and turn him into an advocate of an improved version of it. If such scholarly exercise is centred on mediation and related concepts, then one engages in serious distortion of the Dane, as I have argued. However, there is another way of performing such an exercise that is pleasing to those who identify repetition as his creative impulse: Žižek is first and foremost a Hegelian philosopher, who elevates Hegel to the status of being the most valuable thinker in history. Still, he has deep appreciation for Kierkegaard—and he reconciles the two giants, not on the grounds of how Hegel is commonly conceived, but on the grounds of the Kierkegaardian category of repetition:

> Against the "official" notion of Kierkegaard as *the* "anti-Hegel," one should assert that Kierkegaard is arguably the one who, through his very "betrayal" of Hegel, effectively remained faithful to him. He effectively *repeated* Hegel, in contrast to Hegel's pupils, who "developed" his system further. For Kierkegaard, the Hegelian *Aufhebung* is to be opposed to repetition. Hegel is the ultimate Socratic philosopher of rememorization, of reflectively returning to what the thing always-already was, so that what Hegel lacks is simultaneously repetition and the emergence of the New—the emergence of the New *as* repetition. The Hegelian dialectical process/progress is, in this precise Kierkegaardian sense, the very model of a pseudo-development in which nothing effectively New ever emerges.[206]

The meaning of the passage should be clear by the context that I have provided. In light of how Hegelian mediation and sublation have commonly been understood, Žižek duly accepts Kierkegaard's criticism as valid, but he points out that Hegel still meant to achieve what

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[205] JP III 2352 (*Pap*. V C 12) *n.d.* 1844. The note to which the quotation belongs is not included in the Princeton series. See also discussion in §3.3.2.

[206] Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies*, 12. The term "rememorization" is synonymous with "recollection."

Kierkegaard achieved by the category of repetition. Hegel sought to be a philosopher of becoming in the sense of freedom and the "emergence of the New," but not the pseudo-becoming of unfolding of innate truth by organic development. What Kierkegaard successfully repeated in Hegel, according to Žižek, was fortunately not the ambiguous aspects of his system, but his creative impulse, the impulse of repetition. Žižek is not simply attributing this view retrospectively to Hegel, because a good case can be made that Žižek is actually correct about Hegel. Kierkegaard himself acknowledges that Hegel's true intention was in line with the category of repetition, although he claimed that he had failed in his intention. Moreover, the source of the idea of repetition can arguably be found in Hegel's authorship, as John Stewart points out: "Kierkegaard uses one aspect of Hegel's philosophy, develops it, and then uses it to criticize another aspect of that same philosophy."[207] It is not part of my task to determine the creative impulse of Hegel, but as I have submitted, I claim that the Dane's creative impulse consists in the category of repetition, so that his whole conceptual framework must be understood in terms of it.

A good example of a contemporary scholar who is diametrically opposed to my position in relation to Kierkegaard's creative impulse is Anthony Rudd—and the opposition is reflected in his theory of selfhood, which makes him well suited for a clear contrast. The most detailed account that he provides on his interpretation of Kierkegaard's philosophy of selfhood is to be found in his work *Self, Value, and Narrative: A Kierkegaardian Approach* from 2012, in which he argues for a fourfold interconnected thesis that he calls NEST, which stands for "Narrative, Evaluative, Self-constitution and Teleology."[208] In addition to being a defence of the thesis, the book is declared to be "a defence of the claim that Kierkegaard is an advocate of NEST."[209] I will briefly account for his narrativist and teleological standpoints, as a point of reference for observations I will make in chapters three and four, although my focus must stay on my exegetical task. Rudd's narrativism consists in the view that the self must be understood through the lens of a narrative, both descriptively and normatively. According to his notion of narrativity, which is to a large extent derived from Alastair MacIntyre, the self is "constructed through its telling of its own story," so that it "is not something that just exists, and is then narrated (by itself or by others); it only comes to exist through its being

[207] Stewart, *Kierkegaard's relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 283; see also 303 et al. An almost divine comedy, without doubt appealing to Kierkegaard's sense of humour, begins when the Hegel of Žižek is introduced to Kierkegaard of e.g. Westphal: their places in the history of philosophy are reversed. Kierkegaard emerges as the true advocate of the "Hegelian system," while Hegel emerges as an advocate for Kierkegaardian repetition.

[208] Anthony Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative* (Oxford: OUP 2012), 2.

[209] Ibid., 3.

narrated."[210] What is crucial to the narrativist account of the self, as Rudd makes clear later in the book, is that the story in question is more than a "chronicle," that is to say, more than a "a listing of events in a time-order," because it is a story that has enough coherence to generate meaning: it is "a framework for presenting events in a way that makes sense of them."[211] His argument for attributing this theory to Kierkegaard rests to a large extent on the alleged narrative unity that Judge William invokes in *Either/Or* in order to explain his preference for an ethical mode of living over an aesthetic mode. The Judge criticises the aesthetic individual for lack of personal unity: "His soul is like soil out of which grow all sorts of herbs, all with equal claim to flourish; his self consists of this multiplicity, and he has no self that is higher than this" (EO-II 225). The multiplicity creates a contradiction that results in despair, according to the Judge, so what is needed is to replace the multiplicity with unity through self-choice, initiating a process of self-actualisation: "When the individual has known himself and has chosen himself, he is in the process of actualizing himself, but since he is supposed to do that freely, he must know what it is he wants to actualize." (EO-II 259). Rudd interprets the self-choice and self-actualisation as consisting in choosing and actualising a narrative structure in order to overcome despair and become a proper self. However, apart from the obvious concern that the Judge can hardly be regarded as Kierkegaard's mouthpiece to the extent Rudd makes him, there is a lack of evidence that even the Judge adheres to the view that the unity imposed by self-choice consists in narrative structure.[212] In contrast to Rudd, I contend that the self is forged through repetition, as I will discuss in chapters two and four.[213]

Rudd's teleological interpretation of Kierkegaard is of a Platonic sort: the *telos* is the Good, which he understands to be multifaceted unity of the highest values—presented both by the "Myth of the Cave" in Plato's *Republic*, pointing towards the Form of the Good, and equally

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[210] Ibid., 1. Rudd devotes part three of his work to narrativity, see 163–253. Since the publication of *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre* (Chicago IL: Open Court) in 2001, scholarly debate on Kierkegaard's ideas regarding the self has to a considerable extent been focused on narrativity, that is to say, whether his views reflect a narrative understanding of personal identity, in line with the narrative theories of Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Paul Ricoeur, and others. See John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd, ed., *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue* (Chicago IL: Open Court, 2001). Rudd initially wrote the essay "Reason in Ethics: MacIntyre and Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre* (Chicago IL: Open Court, 2001), 131–150. He then responded to criticism in "Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Narrative Unity—Reply to Lippitt" in *Inquiry*, 50:5, 541–549, followed by "Reason in Ethics Revisited: *Either/Or*, 'Criterionless Choice' and Narrative Unity" in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2008): 179–199, and "In Defence of Narrative" in *European Journal of Philosophy* 17:1 (2007): 60–75.

[211] Ibid., 167.

[212] The narrativist reading of Kierkegaard was critiqued in a noteworthy way by John Lippitt in reviews and papers. His narrative scepticism was first expressed in a review of *Kierkegaard After Macintyre* in *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 22, no. 4 (2005): 496–502. He then criticised the narrative unity theory in two papers, "Telling Tales: Johannes Climacus and 'Narrative Unity'" in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2005): 71–89, and "Getting the Story Straight: Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Some Problems with Narrative" in *Inquiry* 50:1 (2007): 34–69.

[213] See §2.3 and §4.1.

by the "Ascent of Love" in Plato's *Symposium*, namely an ascent of *erōs* towards the Form of Beauty.[214] The relevance of such an end-goal for selfhood is that an orientation towards it results in "psychic harmony," which Rudd calls a "fortunate side-effect."[215] His argument for a teleological reading of Kierkegaard is centred on his interpretation of the dialectical structure of the self that is presented in *Sickness*.[216] I will discuss that dialectical structure in chapter two and explain how my reading differs from Rudd's perspective in chapter three.[217]

In any case, there is one conundrum inherent in the notion of self-becoming that Rudd's conceptual analysis can help us to solve. The conundrum can be phrased by a simple question: if one becomes a self it must mean that one has not always been a self, so what agency engaged in the activity of becoming before the self emerged? Rudd's answer is that Kierkegaard's concept of the self is a thick concept—and that prior to achieving a self, one is a subject and a person. The term *subject* refers to a "mental subject" or "a being to which mental states can correctly be ascribed," so basically every human being is a subject from infancy.[218] A *person* is a subject, but it is a thicker term, which Rudd understands in accordance with John Locke's definition: "a thinking intelligent being that has reason and reflection and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places."[219] Rudd stresses that "what is crucial for personhood is not just consciousness, or even reason, but self-consciousness; the capacity not only to have thoughts, feelings, and desires, but to be aware of oneself as the being who is having these thoughts, feelings and desires."[220] The concept of *self*, however, is even thicker than that of a person; it is synonymous to "having a character" or "coherent personality."[221] So, according to Rudd, Kierkegaard's conception

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214 Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 36. See Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: OUP, 1993), e.g. 240–247 (§514a–520a); and Plato, *Symposium*, trans. M.C. Howatson (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), e.g. 43–44 (§206a–207a). Rudd's conception of the Platonic Good is not controversial and it is in line with the view presented in *Symposium*. However, it should be noted that in *Symposium* the Platonic *telos*, in the sense of being the object of *erōs*, is also claimed to be procreation and immortality: "Why is the object of love procreation? Because procreation is a kind of everlastingness and immortality for the mortal creature, as far as anything can be. If the object of love is indeed everlasting possession of the good, as we have already agreed, it is immortality together with the good that must necessarily be desired. Hence it must follow that the object of love is also immortality" (44, §206e—207a).

215 Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 36. According to a plausible reading of Plato, orientation towards the good results in psychic harmony on the individual level and justice on the social level, but Rudd is concerned with the former. See e.g. Paul Elmer More, *Platonism* (New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1969/1917), 67.

216 Rudd's teleological reading is connected to his strong value realism. He maintains that Kierkegaard expresses "a strong Platonic view of the Good." To be ethical," according to Rudd's Kierkegaard, "is to will the Good, which provides a criterion for projects in which one engages and the way one engages in them and, by so doing, acts to unify the self."[216] The work he relies on as evidence in this regard is *Purity of Heart*, which in the Princeton series was published as part of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (UDVS), trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 2009), 7–154.

217 See §3.3.3.

218 Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 17.

219 Ibid., 18; cf. John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Bk. II, ch. 27, sec. 9.

220 Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 18–19.

221 Ibid., 19-20.

of the self consists in having such a character, but not merely in being a subject or a person. Understood in that way, to be a self is not something we possess by default by merely being alive, but rather an achievement that requires commitment and effort. Accordingly, the activity of self-becoming would consist in the struggle of the human subject to be more than a person—to be a proper self. It is helpful to have such a picture of the concept at the back of one's mind in the subsequent discussion of self-becoming, although I will present a different view of the Kierkegaardian self. However, the linguistic confusion is not erased by describing the self as a thick concept, because it is often clearly used by Kierkegaard in its colloquial thin sense—so, his vocabulary includes two different meanings of the self.

Chapter 2 The Kierkegaardian Self

> We have reality in front of our eyes well before language, and what language does, in its most fundamental gesture, is the very opposite of designating reality: as Lacan put it, it *digs a hole in reality*, opening up the visible/present reality to the dimension of the immaterial/unseen.
>
> — Slavoj Žižek[222]

2.1 Immediacy and the emergence of language

2.1.1 Immediacy interrupted by speech

In order to sufficiently explain Kierkegaard's notion of the self, it is necessary to begin with the state of immediacy, in which no self exists. Immediacy (*Umiddelbarhed*) is a term that captures the quality of direct relationship between two relata, which can be subjects or objects, so that the relationship is not mediated. That is to say, the relationship of immediacy is not filtered through some sort of a medium or an intermediary element. The context in which Kierkegaard normally applies the term is the relationship between a human subject and the world. He does not seem to regard the human sense organs as such intermediary elements, but he considers language to be such an element, along with the reflection that is facilitated by linguistic capacity. This receives, for instance, support from the discussion of the arts in the first part of *Either/Or*, where music is said to continually move "within immediacy" in light of being "furthest removed from language" and thus being the most purely "sensuous" form of art (EO-I 56–57). Another example from *Either/Or* is the immediacy of "the sensuous-erotic," which is transformed in nature by language: "it insists on being expressed and presented in its immediacy," while in mediacy "it falls within language and comes under ethical categories" (EO-I 64). Care is needed when *Either/Or* is invoked as evidence for Kierkegaard's views, but the view expressed is in line with other writings by Kierkegaard on the subject, including the following passage of *De Omnibus*:

> "What . . . is immediacy? It is reality itself [*Realitet*]. What is mediacy? It is the word. How does the one cancel the other? By giving expression to it, for that which is given expression is always *presupposed*.
>
> Immediacy is reality; language is ideality; consciousness is contradiction [*Modsigelse*]. The moment I make a statement about reality, contradiction is present, for what I say is ideality. (DO 168)[223]

[222] Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014), 122.

[223] *Pap.* IV B 1 146.

So, immediacy is said to be "reality itself" in contrast to mediacy which is "the word" or language. The immediate reality is cancelled by language by way of "giving expression to it." The expression is based on thought—a cognitive activity of the subject that "presupposes" the object. In this way, language becomes a filter between the subject and the world. Language is associated with "ideality," because it operates in universals, while unexpressed reality simply is concretely what it is. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard even states that "all human speech . . . is essentially metaphorical [*overført*, carried over] speech" (WL 209). In his scheme of things, proper human consciousness emerges in the distinction between reality and ideality that language creates. The word that is translated as contradiction in the passage, *Modsigelse*, can also mean "opposition"—and the meaning seems to be that self-consciousness is rooted in the opposition or contrast between reality and ideality, rather than consisting in a contradiction, in the literal sense.[224]

The account of immediacy and language that is most relevant to Kierkegaard's philosophy of the self is to be found in *The Concept of Anxiety*, particularly in relation to the story of Adam and Eve in Paradise and their Fall, which is charged with philosophical meaning in addition to a theological one. As George Pattison observes, "questions of language are of constant importance in Kierkegaard's authorship"—and "language is given a central if rarely noticed role in Kierkegaard's account of the Fall," in particular concerning "the self-relation that is at the centre of the whole scenario of anxiety."[225] The concept of the Fall, in its most elementary theological sense, is used to describe the transition of the first human beings from a state of innocence, where God is obeyed spontaneously without sin, to a corrupt state of guilt, where sin enters the world. In the state of innocence, there is no knowledge of good and evil, but the Fall brings such knowledge, so that distinction between the two is recognised. However, the Fall can also be understood symbolically to refer to the transition of the human species from primitive life without language towards a linguistic form of life, in which consciousness and conscience are gradually transformed to a more advanced level. Without language there can be no knowledge in the proper sense, only animalistic coping and sentiments. Understood in that way, the Fall symbolises the emergence of language and

[224] The background of Kierkegaard's perspective on immediacy is likely to be found in the philosophy of Hegel, in which the dialectical relation between immediacy and reflection plays an important role. See e.g. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 447–48 (§II.351–2).

[225] Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 76. Kangas also highlights the importance of language for the beginning of selfhood: "Haufniensis . . . places *language* into the role as what draws innocence into self. Both in the form of the prohibition against eating from the tree of good and evil and in the serpent's speech, language solicits selfhood by seeming to give content to the abyss of nonbeing (of freedom) disclosed in anxiety. Language is therefore the medium of self-disclosure, the agent of seduction, that operates within innocence to draw latent spirit into self. Prior to self-consciousness explicitly positing itself, language must already have been operative." Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 174.

how it transforms the humankind, which is a topic relevant to philosophical anthropology. A noteworthy contemporary scholar in that field is Eric Gans, who claims that "the event of the origin of language is the true origin of the human" by adding "a new dimension to animal existence."[226] He argues that "language brings into being *an entirely new kind of entity*, the category or *type* . . . that is nowhere to be found in the real, material world."[227] According to him, "language involves virtual beings of a new kind that 'exist' nowhere but in the communal domain of language itself."[228] Moreover, he regards language as a singular event which determines the preconditions of all subsequent human development. Gans frequently links his philosophical anthropology to Christian mythology in a way that is reminiscent of Kierkegaard. He does not cite the Dane in any of his writings, but he would recognise much of his perspective in *Concept of Anxiety*. In that work, Kierkegaard, via Haufniensis, equates the state of innocence before the Fall with a state of ignorance—and what he refers to as the spirit (*Aand*) of the human being does not operate in such a state: "In innocence, man is not qualified as spirit but is psychically qualified in immediate unity with his natural condition. The spirit in man is dreaming" (CA 41). The state of the human species before the Fall is the natural and animalistic state of immediacy, where the human spirit is "dreaming," which is another way of saying that the human spirit is dormant, so that it exists in human beings as potential capacity, thus distinguishing humanity from other species: "In innocence, man is not merely animal, for if he were at any moment of his life merely animal, he would never become man. So, spirit is present, but as immediate, as dreaming" (CA 43). The transition in which animalistic innocence and ignorance is lost, is referred to as a "qualitative leap" (CA 41), because it signifies a new condition of humanity. Symbolically, the leap can be considered a sudden event, as in the Biblical story where Eve eats the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, tempted by the serpent.[229] However, it would be more accurate to describe the transition as a gradual process over a period of time. The indispensable content is, as Pattison observes, that "the human being starts out from nature, as a part of nature and in complete continuity with it," while, "at the same time, Kierkegaard takes it as axiomatic that the human being is also *qua* human destined to become spirit."[230] That is

[226] Eric Gans, *The Origin of Language*, 2nd ed (New York, NY: Spuyten Duyvil, 2019/1981), 19.

[227] Eric Gans, *A New Way of Thinking: Generative Anthropology in Religion, Philosophy, Art* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, 2011), 5.

[228] Ibid., 6.

[229] Genesis 2:16–17.

[230] Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 50.

to say, the human species was destined to actualise its dormant spirit at some point in time, or, as I have argued, destined to actualise its linguistic capacity.

Haufniensis is concerned with finding a "psychological explanation" (CA 41) for the qualitative leap, rather than a theological one, and in line with what I established at the beginning of this section, he finds the explanation in the "word" which is without doubt an alias for language: "Innocence still is, but only a word is required and then ignorance is concentrated. Innocence naturally cannot understand this word, but at that moment anxiety has, as it were, caught its first prey. Instead of nothing, it now has an enigmatic word" (CA 44). The role of anxiety and nothingness will not be discussed until the next subsection, but at this point our focus is on the emergence of language as what ruptures the natural state of immediacy—and thus generating the qualitative leap in which spirit is activated in human beings. The "enigmatic word" that is mentioned is a word of prohibition, because a language of prohibition seems to play a special role in the qualitative leap. The point is first made in theological language: "When it is stated in Genesis that God said to Adam, 'Only from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you must not eat,' it follows as a matter of course that Adam really has not understood this word, for how could he understand the difference between good and evil when this distinction would follow as a consequence of the enjoyment of the fruit?" (CA 44) However, Haufniensis is quick to turn God's command into psychological tension within a human being: it is stated that the "one need merely assume that Adam talked to himself," so that "the imperfection in the story, namely that another spoke to Adam about what he did not understand, is thus eliminated" (CA 44). Pattison draws attention to this fact and argues that Kierkegaard, "having excluded any external speaker," as well as "God as the occult agent of Adam's speech," has in fact "thrown the full weight of his argument on to Adam's capacity for language."[231] To elaborate on the situation, let us take an example of a primitive human being who points at potentially poisonous mushrooms and expresses a simple sound for negation: "no!" The meaning of the expression is: "one should not eat those mushrooms, as they could be dangerous." The person speaking the word and his fellow tribespeople grasp the meaning in an instinctive manner but are not advanced enough linguistically to be able to articulate the full meaning. The negation has a psychological impact, because it invokes curiosity and desire about what it prohibits. The primitive language soon invokes temptation, or the possibility of violating the command, and a primordial ethical

[231] Ibid., 78.

wisdom begins to take root. A form of life defined by immediacy is gradually replaced by a form of life where reflection has become prominent.

The leap from immediacy to reflection, generated by language, results in a new consciousness, qualitatively different from the one that existed before. It would be wrong to say that pre-linguistic humans entirely lacked consciousness, but it is likely to have been in the same category as that of advanced mammals, for example the one people recognise in their dogs. As Pattison explains, there is "a kind of consciousness, a kind of *self*-consciousness we spontaneously attribute to human beings that is different in kind from whatever consciousness we also attribute to animals."[232] In an endnote, he adds a prudent disclaimer, which I adopt for my discussion as well:

> I am aware that I am making some very broad generalizations here that concern matters of intense scientific and public debate. However, my point is not to insist that this is how the differences between infants and adults or between animals and human beings are to be understood, but rather to characterize a long-held popular wisdom, what Heidegger might have called the point of view of average everydayness, for the purpose of clarifying Kierkegaard's starting point.[233]

Linguistic consciousness is qualitatively different to the extent that we can hardly imagine how pre-linguistic humans experienced themselves and the world, that is to say, the nature of their consciousness. The same applies to people's sense of their freedom. In immediacy instincts are paramount, while the reflective nature of linguistic beings brings a qualitative different kind of choice. It can be said that the emergence of language marks the beginning of *human* consciousness and *human* freedom—and both are regarded as features of spirit by Kierkegaard.[234] As Pattison puts it, "to exist as spirit would mean (minimally) to be characterized by self-consciousness and self-directing-freedom, to be capable of action in a decisive sense and, therefore, responsible."[235] The acquisition of language activates both self-consciousness and freedom, in the specifically human sense in which he uses the terms.

The question of what all this has to do with Kierkegaard's notion of the self is easy to answer: Anti-Climacus states in *Sickness* that the "spirit is the self" (SUD 13). As will be addressed later in this chapter, the spirit is not the whole self, but rather its active structuring force. The account of the spirit by Anti-Climacus is in line with the account of the spirit by Haufniensis,

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232 Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 49.

233 Ibid., 188.

234 Evidence in this regard will be provided in §2.3 in which Kierkegaard's concepts of consciousness and freedom will be defined and discussed.

235 Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 50–51.

so that there is congruity across pseudonyms, indicating that the views can be attributed to Kierkegaard. Pattison emphasises this point. He observes that "the picture of the self that emerges in *The Concept of Anxiety* is not unique in Kierkegaard's writings":

> On the contrary, it is very much of a piece with a large body of descriptive psychological studies that can be found in just about every genre within his authorship . . . [T]his includes *Repetition* and *The Sickness unto Death*, but also passages from just about any of the major pseudonymous works as well as from the religious treatises that accompanied them, published under Kierkegaard's own name.[236]

Haufniensis for example calls a human being "a synthesis of the psychical and the physical," "united in a third" that is "spirit" (CA 43), which corresponds to the description by Anti-Climacus. Kierkegaard does not account for the human constitution before the spirit becomes activated, but it is qualitatively different to the extent that it does not make sense to talk about a synthesis between psychic and physical elements at all: "The synthesis of the psychical and the physical is to be posited by spirit," as Haufniensis explains (CA 90).[237] The self that emerges through linguistic acquisition is a primitive self—what Kierkegaard calls the first self, as I will address in this chapter—that is to say, the beginning of proper human self-consciousness and freedom. Haufniensis is clear on this point: "the real 'self' is posited only by the qualitative leap. In the prior state there can be no question about it" (CA 79).

I have established that the human self emerges at a certain point in human history, influencing subsequent generations of people. However, Haufniensis is keen to point out that the process repeats itself within each individual that is born: "every subsequent individual begins in the very same way [as Adam], but within the quantitative difference that is the consequence of the relationship of generation and the historical relationship. Thus, the moment is there for Adam as well as for every subsequent individual" (CA 90). We are all born without language, so we are born without even a first self in the Kierkegaardian sense, but we acquire such a self through language acquisition, which provides us with the basis of a new sense of self-consciousness and a new sense of freedom. As will be made clear in this chapter and the next one, Kierkegaard's concept of self-becoming is the advancement of such self-consciousness and freedom. It is an open-ended process: the end of the road is a perfection of which we have no conception, but the striving can continue unto death. It is a subjective advancement stripped of any known teleological direction: human beings cannot escape the uncertainty of how they should apply their freedom, so the burden of

[236] Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 48.

[237] The meaning of this synthesis will be explained in §2.3. See in particular §2.3.2.

responsibility is not merely the burden of fulfilling one's task, but also the burden of determining what one's task should be in the first place. An important meaning of the theatre, which we accounted for in the previous chapter, is to lay out possibilities from which to choose. Free decisions bring anxiety, but there is also anxiety before freedom properly becomes part of one's constitution, as will be addressed next.

2.1.2 Anxiety in paradise

The story that I have told so far in this chapter is only half of the story—and the full picture of the status of immediacy and the qualitative leap does not emerge unless the role of anxiety is explained. As Gregory Beabout correctly observes, "the concept of anxiety is important for Kierkegaard not simply because he is interested in describing and probing human emotions, but because he is seeking insight into being human."[238] Anxiety is a translation of the Danish term *Angest*, which has also been rendered as anguish or dread.[239] The Danish term denotes a strong feeling of unease brought about by a situation that is conceived of as very difficult or dangerous. In articulating its meaning, Kierkegaard's Haufniensis is keen to distinguish it from fear of something in particular and to associate it rather with a general emotional and existential response to freedom: "I must point out that it is altogether different from fear and similar concepts that refer to something definite, whereas anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility. For this reason, anxiety is not found in the beast, precisely because by nature the beast is not qualified as spirit" (CA 42). So, animals do not suffer anxiety because they do not have the constitution in which spirit operates, along with its self-consciousness and freedom. However, here Haufniensis makes an important distinction between animals without linguistic capacity and pre-linguistic humans, whose constitution makes language a future possibility and in whom spirit is dormant. So, according to Haufniensis, there is also anxiety in the pre-Fall state of immediacy—and it is this anxiety in paradise that stirs and accelerates linguistic and epistemological progress: "that anxiety makes its appearance is the pivot upon which everything turns" (CA 43).[240]

Haufniensis describes the state of immediacy and the interference of anxiety in the following way: "In this state there is peace and repose, but there is simultaneously something else that

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238 Gregory R. Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2009/1996), 36.

239 The term "dread" was e.g. used in the first translation of *The Concept of Anxiety* into English by Walter Lowrie; see *The Concept of Dread* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1944). However, I'll follow Howard and Edna Hong in translating *Angest* as anxiety, as has become the standard practice.

240 The phrase "anxiety in paradise" is reminiscent to the title of one of Slavoj Žižek's books, *Trouble in Paradise* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), which captures the irony of problems in some state of affairs that should not have problems by definition.

is not contention and strife, for there is indeed nothing against which to strive. What, then, is it? Nothing. But what effect does nothing have? It begets anxiety. This is the profound secret of innocence, that it is at the same time anxiety" (CA 41). This needs to be construed with caution. It is easy to jump to the conclusion that Kierkegaard is after all just describing the mythical life in Abrahamic paradise, non-metaphorically. For sure, the struggle for existence was extremely harsh for pre-linguistic humans, not exactly "peace and repose" with no "contention and strife." However, it must be kept in mind that such a description of the state of immediacy is of the same vein as Kierkegaard's description of such immediacy in the discourse *What We Learn from the Lilies in the Field and from the Birds of the* Air.[241] The lilies and the birds represent natural immediacy, without anxiety, and the point of the discourse is that human beings can learn from them not to be unnecessarily burdened by worries in their daily life. The lilies and the birds engage in a harsh struggle for existence, but—contrary to humans—they do not add to the torment of existence by regretting past actions, by anticipating future distress, and not least by constant comparison with their peers: "Worldly worry always seeks to lead a human being into the small-minded unrest of comparisons, away from the lofty calmness of simple thoughts" (UDVS 188). What Kierkegaard is advocating for in the discourse is that people should acquire such "lofty calmness of simple thoughts," which is a mode of living where the bewitchment of our linguistic nature is tempered. A linguistic nature is considered to be a "second nature" by John McDowell: "Human beings acquire a second nature in part by being initiated into conceptual capacities, whose interrelations belong to the logical space of reasons."[242] One way of viewing Kierkegaard as a poet-philosopher is that he is engaging with the existential challenges of such linguistic and rational second nature. The human species cannot return to the pre-Fall natural immediacy, just as each individual cannot return to the immediacy of his or her pre-linguistic infancy—and even if such regression to primitivism would be possible, it would indeed be hard to make a convincing case for it. However, Kierkegaard is in search for a progression towards a "new immediacy," in which people's reflective mode of being can acquire the "lofty calmness of simple thoughts." The source of the vitality of the aesthetic sphere can be traced to instinctive immediacy, personified by Don Giovanni in *Either/Or*, and Kierkegaard's advocacy for his conception of the Christian faith centres upon such new immediacy.[243] The term "primitive" (*primitiv*) even acquires positive connotations for

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241 The discourse, which is a commentary on Matthew 6:26, is part of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (UDVS), trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NY: PUP, 1993). Hereafter: *The Lilies and the Birds*.

242 John McDowell, *Mind and World*, 2nd ed (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996/1994), xx.

243 See §3.3.

Kierkegaard, expressing an important connection that human civilization should have to primordial vitality and simplicity.

Returning to the core of this subsection's subject-matter, I will now address the "nothing" that "begets anxiety," as it is phrased in the lines quoted above. I have already established that Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety primarily refers to a strong feeling of unease in facing one's freedom, along with possibilities and a sense of uncertainty. I have also established that freedom does not become an issue except after the qualitative leap to a reflective mode of being. Moreover, I have pointed out that "beasts" cannot suffer from anxiety in Kierkegaard's scheme of things, but that pre-linguistic human beings can do so in light of their capacity for spirit, although it is still dormant. It must follow from this premise that the pre-linguistic humans suffer from anxiety that is not a reaction to freedom, but of a different kind—and that is what Kierkegaard is communicating when he defines such anxiety as a reaction to one's sense of nothingness. Haufniensis states that "dreamily the spirit projects its own actuality, but this actuality is nothing, and innocence always sees this nothing outside itself." In commenting on such nothingness in context of the anxiety of children, Pattison offers an insightful elucidation, which to some degree reduces the apparent obscurity:

> Anxiety, then, is the child's dream of its own possibility for acquiring a kind of existence of which it cannot yet conceive. This existence is "nothing" in that it has no definite place in its life, yet is also precisely what makes it what it is, human and not animal. At one and the same time it is repelled by the incomprehensibility of this "nothing," yet, at the same time, it is drawn towards it by an inarticulate sense that this "nothing" contains the secret of its own existence.[244]

Whether Haufniensis, as construed by Pattison, is correct in this regard will not be determined here, but it surely is a curious fact that infants appear much more anxious than the offspring of any other mammal, which is, for example, manifested in the extent to which infants cry.[245] In any case, it is somewhat easier to imagine how a sense of nothingness begets anxiety in primordial human beings—and that is, after all, the situation to which Haufniensis is primarily referring.[246] A sense of nothingness is likely to simultaneously be a sense of meaninglessness, so that one is struck with the sentiment that existence lacks meaning. It is conceivable that primordial human beings developed a vague sense of such nothingness and as a result experience the very first stage of anxiety. The anxiety in the vicinity of the

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244 Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 51.

245 Hunger and thirst are considered to be major reasons for why infants cry, but such factors apply also to the new-born of other species, without signs of similar unrest.

246 The tenability of Haufniensis's view in this regard, is of course debatable.

qualitative leap, however, is linked to the prohibition that we mentioned in the previous subsection, as Haufniensis explains as follows:

> When it is assumed that the prohibition awakens the desire, one acquires knowledge instead of ignorance, and in that case Adam must have had a knowledge of freedom, because the desire was to use it. The explanation is therefore subsequent. The prohibition induces in him anxiety, for the prohibition awakens in him freedom's possibility. What passed by innocence as the nothing of anxiety has now entered into Adam, and here again it is a nothing—the anxious possibility of *being able.*

To experience nothingness is closely connected to experiencing freedom, as the passage shows: the nothingness of anxiety in immediacy converts into "the anxious possibility of *being able*," which is another type of "nothing." Pure freedom is pure possibility, empty of definite content on its own, and thus akin to nothingness. Recall that it is a defining feature of anxiety that it is not a response to something in particular—and nothingness shares with freedom the quality of representing no particular thing: "Just as the relation of anxiety to its object, to something that is nothing (linguistic usage also says pregnantly: to be anxious about nothing), is altogether ambiguous, so also the transition that is to be made from innocence to guilt will be so dialectical that it can be seen that the explanation is what it must be, psychological" (CA 43). The transition from innocence to guilt is the qualitative leap from immediacy to reflection, whereas the guilt results from the awareness of good and evil and the ethical awareness makes demands one is not able to fulfil in a flawless manner. However, the state of innocence fades away gradually while the anxiety continues after the leap, as can be seen from the following lines: "The anxiety that is posited in innocence is in the first place no guilt, and in the second place it is no troublesome burden, no suffering that cannot be brought into harmony with the blessedness of innocence. In observing children, one will discover this anxiety intimated more particularly as a seeking for the adventurous, the monstrous, and the enigmatic" (CA 42). So, anxiety in innocence is a source of youthful impetus, but the source of such anxiety is not entirely clear from the context. Self-consciousness and a sense of freedom are gradually growing in young people—and their anxiety must at least partly result from such awareness, although it can be mixed with anxiety rooted in a sense of nothingness as well, that is to say, rooted in a youthful nihilism and a search for meaning.

The unrest of anxiety, brought about by the ordeal of confronting nothingness and freedom, functions as a *primus motor* for human development, both in relation to the history of

humanity and in relation to the development of individuals, including their self-becoming.[247] Arne Grøn stresses the role of anxiety in self-becoming. "The possibility of freedom manifested in anxiety," according to him, "demands that we choose or define ourselves," because "that which produces anxiety is the fact that the situation we are in depends on ourselves, and that we therefore have to make a choice."[248] In other words, anxiety effectively demands resolution in relation to selfhood.

Anxiety is a double-edged sword: it is a stimulating torment, even to the extent that "the more profound the anxiety, the more profound the culture" (CA 42). Haufniensis also states that "less spirit" means "less anxiety" (CA 42), which means that the advancement of one's spirit, which is the advancement of one's self—one's self-consciousness and freedom—results in more anxiety. Thus, there is deep ambivalence inherent in the self-becoming process. The ambivalence is expressed in the following way by Pattison:

> There is no reason why anxiety should not manifest itself at a variety of moments in life, if we once regard human freedom and consciousness in terms of process and emergence rather than as attributes fixed once and for all in the human essence. Each time there is a development within the life of spirit there will be the possibility of anxiety, whether as help, hindrance or accompaniment to that development.[249]

However, it is important to note that anxiety is not a misrelation in selfhood, contrary to Kierkegaard's concept of despair, which can be described as misrelation. The relationship between anxiety and despair has frequently been misunderstood in scholarship. Gregor Malantschuk, for example, views despair as an intensification of the misrelation that is found in anxiety.[250] Beabout forcefully argues against this position. He maintains that, instead of being a misrelation, "anxiety is an ontological structure in which the self is both attracted to and repulsed from the nothingness of future possibilities."[251] Such a description is in close proximity to what I have discussed. With regard to despair, in contrast, Beabout is correct in quoting approvingly from a work by George E Arbaugh and George B Arbaugh, in which it is defined as "the dreadful sickness that befalls spirit through its wrong use of freedom."[252] The role of despair in self-becoming will be explained in chapter three, but now I will turn

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247 As we previously quoted, Haufniensis claims that anxiety "is the pivot upon which everything turns" (CA 43). In this regard, see also §2.3.5 on freedom and §3.2 on pathos.

248 Arne Grøn, *The Concept of Anxiety in Søren Kierkegaard* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 65.

249 Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 56.

250 Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, ed. and trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1971), 339.

251 Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses*, 27.

252 Ibid., 29. See also George B Arbaugh and George E Arbaugh, *Kierkegaard's Authorship* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), 297.

to the topic of the self that emerges after the state of immediacy has been replaced by a linguistic mode of existence.

2.2 The first self and the deeper self

2.2.1 Preface to the concept of the self

In the last section I began an analysis of Kierkegaard's concept of the self by discussing the beginning of selfhood and associating it with language acquisition, as well as exploring the role of anxiety. The self was introduced as spirit in the section, and the notion of the spirit was explained as self-consciousness and freedom. This is a theme that will be continued in section 2.3. In this section, however, I will address Kierkegaard's distinction between the "first self" and the "deeper self." The focus passage from which I will set out the discussion is the following one in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*:

> When a person turns and faces himself in order to understand himself, he steps, as it were, in the way of the first self, halts that which was turned outward in hankering for and seeking after the surrounding world that is its object, and summons it back from the external. In order to prompt the first self to this withdrawal, the deeper self lets the surrounding world remain what it is—remain dubious. (EUD 314)

The first thing to notice is that the first self and the deeper self exist simultaneously and that they are in conflict with each other, in the sense that the deeper self is attempting to administer the first self. However, this cannot mean that people are in general in some way schizophrenic. Individuals normally identify with one self, not two—and although the division indicates a split within selfhood, it must be a split between two elements of the self rather than a split between two selves. At one point, Kierkegaard refers to the elements collectively as the "shared mind" (EUD 317). The second thing to notice is that the first self identifies with the "surrounding world," while the deeper self "summons it back from the external," which indicates that the former element is closer to immediacy and the latter one is more inward and subjective. Moreover, in line with such observation, one can assume that Kierkegaard's designation of the two elements of the self is not insignificant, so that the first self-element must be somehow prior to the deeper self-element, which in turn represents later development within selfhood. This is in line with the assumption I made in the last section on the "first self" that initially emerges after linguistic acquisition.

When Kierkegaard refers to the "real self," he seems to be variously referring to the whole self in contrast to the state of immediacy, such as when he, via *Haufniensis*, says that the real self results from the qualitative leap (CA 79), or to the deeper self in contrast to the first self,

such as when he says in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* that "a person's real self seems to him to be so far distant that the whole world seems much closer to him" (SUD 313). Scare quotes are used for the "self" in the former instance, which indicates that Kierkegaard does not regard the whole self as a proper self, if the deeper self has not yet developed. It would be inaccurate to identify the first self as a thin colloquial concept of the self, while identifying the deeper self as a thick concept.[253] A better description would be to say that *the real self, in which the deeper self-element has developed*, is a thick concept of the self.

In the focus passage above, the conflict between the two self-elements is characterised as an inner struggle between worldliness and "withdrawal" from the world by letting the "surrounding world" of our experience "remain dubious." The withdrawal in question, urged by the deeper self, does not have to mean ascetic world rejection, but can mean subjective distance from immediacy, so that one's subjectivity and inwardness is advanced, resulting in increased self-consciousness, increased sense of freedom—and ultimately in new world affirmation. Both options seem to be possible, according to Kierkegaard.[254] In any case, he prefers world-affirming religious perspective, as is, for example, indicated in the following passage, where the conflict, and a subsequent victory of world-withdrawal, is characterised as "sickness" that "is not unto death but unto life." The passage casts important light on the inner struggle—and it is necessary to quote it at some length:

> This is indeed the way it is; the world around us is inconstant and can be changed into the opposite at any moment, and there is not one person who can force this change by his own might or by the conjuration of his wish. The deeper self now shapes the deceitful flexibility of the surrounding world in such a way that it is no longer attractive to that first self. Then the first self either must proceed to kill the deeper self, to render it forgotten, whereby the whole matter is given up; or it must admit that the deeper self is right, because to want to predicate constancy of something that continually changes is indeed a contradiction, and as soon as one confesses that it changes, it can, of course, change in that same moment. . . .
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> . . . The person who witnesses that struggle in his inner being must concede that the deeper self is right: in that minute everything can be changed, and one who does not discover this continually runs aimlessly. . . . Ah, it is a painful situation. The first self sits and looks at all the beckoning fruits, and it is indeed so clear that if one just makes a move everything will succeed, as everyone will admit—but the deeper self sits there as earnest and thoughtful as the physician at the bedside of the sick, yet also with transfigured gentleness, because it know that this sickness is not unto death but unto life. (EUD 314–315)

253 See §1.3.

254 See §3.3.

Eventually, the conflict is replaced by reconciliation between the first self-element and the deeper self-element:

> When the first self submits to the deeper self, they are reconciled and walk on together. Then the deeper self probably says: "It is true that I had almost forgotten it in our great struggle—what was it now that you so fervently wished; at this moment I do not think there is anything to hinder the fulfilment of our wish if you will only not forget that little secret we two have between us. Now, you see, now you can be gratified. . . . Would you not be better off now by having lost some of that burning desire and having won the understanding that life cannot deceive you; is not that kind of losing a winning?"
>
> That little secret we two have between us, as the deeper self said. What, presumably, is this secret, my listener? What else but this, that with regard to the external a person is capable of nothing at all. If he wants to seize the external immediately, it can be changed in the same instant, and he can be deceived; on the other hand, he can take it with the consciousness that it could also be changed, and he is not deceived even though it is changed, because he has the deeper self's consent. (EUD 316–317)

The initial question that must be raised in relation to these strange paragraphs is whether such peculiar and cryptic language, seemingly belonging to an intellectual field somewhere between poetic theology and armchair psychology, can be made sense of in a way that has philosophical significance. I claim that it has such significance—and that the notions of the first self and the deeper self are best illuminated by putting them in the context of Sigmund Freud's structural model of the self. I will comment on the conflict and reconciliation paragraphs in the next subsection, which I will devote to the Freudian context. For the rest of this subsection, however, I will prepare the ground for further coverage by inspecting the general concept of the self in academic philosophy.

The entry on the "self" in Simon Blackburn's *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* is short and insubstantial: "The elusive 'I' that shows an alarming tendency to disappear when we try to introspect it."[255] The definition is a bit more generous in an Oxford English dictionary: "A person's essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action."[256] To describe the self as the essence of our being captures well how the term is used in daily language, although the nature of the essence is far from clear to us, and to identify such a self as an "object of introspection or reflexive action" is also in line with common usage of the term.

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255 Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 332.

256 https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/self

Blackburn's references to elusiveness and a disappearing tendency, however, reflects a sceptical view of the self in scholarship—and such impression is supported by the list of related entries to which one is directed: "Cartesian dualism,"[257] "personal identity," and the "Bundle Theory of the Mind or Self." The entry on "personal identity" is solely on the problem that such a concept poses. The frequently-cited thought experiment in metaphysics on the "ship of Theseus" is not mentioned, but the problem of personal identity is identical to the question that the thought experiment raises, namely the riddle of how changes affect the identity of an object. The "Bundle Theory" exemplifies a sceptical approach to personal identity, which can be traced to David Hume, although he became suspicious regarding its veracity. According to the theory, the notion of an enduring and unified self is fictional, as a human being does merely have access to her succession of experiences and mental states, and the reality of an enduring and unified self cannot be inducted from such observation. Blackburn expresses the prevailing consensus when he diagnoses the underlying problem as follows: "the idea of one determinate self, that survives through life's normal changes of experience and personality, seems to be highly metaphysical. But if we avoid it we seem to be left only with the experiences themselves, and no account of their unity in one life, or as it is sometimes put, no idea of the rope around the bundle."[258] I will generally refrain from using the term "personal identity" in my account of Kierkegaard's notion of selfhood, because such terminology would link the discussion to a highly specialised field within contemporary analytic philosophy—and it would seriously distract me from my task of explaining Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming to engage with that field.[259] The exception is when the view presented is contrasted to narrativist theories of the self, in which references are made to narrative identity.

As a result of the considerations that have now been mentioned, the self-concept does not feature prominently in scientific vocabulary. Instead, one is likely to encounter the term's Latin-derived variant: the "ego." While the meaning of the "self" has been shaped by common parlance, the meaning of the "ego" has primarily been derived from the meaning it has acquired in science, in particular, of course, by its use in psychology. Although the

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257 Cartesian dualism is the well-known mind-body dualism of René Descartes. See n262 below (in relation to Immanuel Kant) on the Cartesian subject.

258 Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 49.

259 In recent years, a few valuable works have been published where Kierkegaard's philosophy of the self has been discussed in relation to the field of personal identity, or which have at least included such sections, including the following: Patrick Stokes, *The Naked Self: Kierkegaard and Personal Identity* (Oxford: OUP, 2015); John J. Davenport, *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Mortality: From Frankfurt and MacIntyre to Kierkegaard* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012); and John Lippitt and Patrick Stokes, ed., *Narrative, Identity and the Kierkegaardian Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

terminological preference is in line with the familiar practice of isolating scientific terms from terms that are shaped by everyday meaning, it is not always clear that it has changed anything to replace the "self" with the "ego." A good example is Blackburn's definition of ego, appearing in the same work as the notoriously brusque description of self as "the elusive I":

> The thinking, active self; the self conceived of as the organizing and continuing subject of experience and the author of action. In Kant there is a distinction between the empirical ego, given in ordinary self-consciousness, and the transcendental or pure ego which cannot be known but must be presupposed for our experience to have the unity that it needs in order to be experience at all. In Freudian psychology the ego is the conscious self, occupying a beleaguered middle ground between the disreputable demands of the id, and the repressive discipline of the superego.[260]

In comparison to the entry on the "self," this entry on the "ego" is put forward with much more assurance: there is no hint that one is dealing with a pseudo-phenomenon and the reader is not directed to a potentially demystifying doctrine, such as the bundle theory. However, the ego is explained in terms of the "active self," "conceived of as the organizing and continuing subject of experience and the author of action," which is basically equivalent to the self-concept that the bundle theory questions. By the same token, the reference to Immanuel Kant's "empirical ego" and "pure ego" could have been made in the entry on the "self." The terms are translations of "empirisches Ich" and "reines Ich," which directly translate to English as the "empirical I" and the "pure I." It is also common to render the terms as "empirical self" and "pure self," without intention to change the meaning, so ego and self are considered synonyms in the context of Kantian philosophy.[261] The empirical self is the phenomenal locus of personality in the sense that this self can be perceived as an object, while its pure counterpart refers to an awareness that is exclusively subjective.[262] Moreover, Kant used the German word for self (*Selbst*) frequently, for example in relation to the "actual self" (*eigentliche Selbst*), which is a human being's practical manifestation of the rational will.[263] Related

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260 Ibid., 110.

261 See e.g. Elmar Waibl and Philip Herdina, *Dictionary of Philosophical Terms, Vol. 2: English–German / Englisch–Deutsch* (London: K.G. Saur and Routledge, 1997), 120 and 321.

262 Edmund Husserl, who adopted Kant's terminology in this regard, interpreted the pure self as pure consciousness. If so, it would correspond to P. F. Strawson's interpretation of the 'Cartesian subject' (also called the 'Cartesian self') as a pure individual consciousness (*Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Routledge, 1959), 115). In Descartes's thought experiment, the mind of an individual is separated from all externalities, including the body in which it resides (see *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 18). In any case, Kant was overall fairly critical of Cartesian rationalism.

263 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, revised edition, ed. Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: CUP 2012), 67 (§4:589). Kant was concerned with the actual conditions of selfhood, but he was keen to stress the limitations of rationally understanding the self in its totality (see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 411–444).

to his notion of the actual self is his formulation of a duty to cultivate one's natural powers.[264] This aspect of Kant's philosophy of the self is the feature that is most concretely suitable for illumination of Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming, independent of the question of whether Kant's ideas directly influenced the Dane.[265]

The other reference made in Blackburn's entry on the ego, namely to the psychology of Freud, provides a particularly useful context for explaining Kierkegaard's philosophy of the self, as I have already mentioned—and as now is timely to address. However, it should be kept in mind that I am not engaging in a comparative study, but rather invoking Freud's structural model of selfhood to cast light on Kierkegaard's outlook.

2.2.2 Proto-Freudian structure

Freud is the figure who is most prominently associated with the concept of the ego—and the term is popularised through translations of his works—but the word that he actually opted for in his native German was the same term that Kant used, the first-person singular nominative case pronoun: "Ich." Throughout his career, Freud sought to understand the structure of personality. His original "topographic model" highlighted the distinction between the conscious, unconscious, and preconscious, facets of personality,[266] but he replaced it with the "structural model" according to which personality is described through three fundamental constructs: "the id" (*Das Es*), "the ego" (*Das Ich*), and "the superego" (*Das Über-Ich*), which can be considered as a portion of the ego.[267] These constructs constitute the anchor of Freudian psychology.

The id, which in a more literal translation would simply be "the it," is the only component of personality that is present from the very beginning of a human life. It is a mental apparatus that is fully subconscious,[268] and it carries one's instincts, passion, and psychic energy, free from any self-imposed discipline:

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264 Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 565 (§6:445). The work was originally published in German in 1797.

265 The most thorough case for linking the ideas of Kant and Kierkegaard is made by Ronald M. Green in his *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Depth* (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 1992), but his analysis doesn't feature ideas concerning the self.

266 The "conscious" consists of material that is within one's awareness; the "unconscious" consists of material that isn't within one's awareness; and the "preconscious" consists of material that isn't within one's awareness, but that can promptly be brought to one's mind.

267 Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. James Strachey (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1960/1923), 11–36.

268 Freud uses the term "unconscious," but in line with contemporary terminology it is better to use "subconscious." The terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but when a distinction is made between them, unconsciousness refers to the state of having lost consciousness, e.g. when one falls asleep, while subconsciousness refers to the part of the psyche that operates below consciousness and which might be able to burst into consciousness.

> It is the dark, inaccessible part of our personality; what little we know of it we have learnt from our study of the dream-work and of the construction of neurotic symptoms[.] We approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations. . . . It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle.[269]

By the "pleasure principle" Freud is referring to the tendency of aiming at pleasure and avoiding pain or discomfort. The picture is clear: the id is the primal and sensuous side of one's personality that operates blindly, behind the curtain of one's consciousness.

The ego develops from the id, in a secondary process that starts within the first year of one's birth. The process is complex, but among relevant factors are the first stages of "word-presentations" and "internal thought-processes" turned into "perceptions."[270] The ego operates at both the subconscious and the conscious level—and it can be described as "kind of a façade of the id, as a frontage, like an external, cortical layer of it" that has been "modified by the influence of the external world."[271] Thus, "the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own."[272] The desires and pleasures of the ego are filtered through reflection in contrast to the purely subconscious desires of the id. In addition to fixation on desires and pleasures, the ego operates by what Freud calls the "reality principle," according to which "real circumstances in the outer world" shape the mental functioning and develop "an impartial *passing of judgement*."[273] The relations between the ego and the id are complicated, but the main idea is that the ego brings elements of calculated self-preservation, discipline, reason, and common sense to the chaotic impulses of the id.[274]

An interesting comparison can be made to Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of interactions between Dionysian and Apollonian aesthetic elements.[275] Nietzsche applied those concepts to personalities as well, and he, for example, admired the poet and polymath Johann Wolfgang von Goethe for combining the Dionysian quality of vigorous, cheerful, creative, and passionate striving with the Apollonian quality of meaningful, authentic, beautiful, level-headed, form-

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269 Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965/1933), 91–92.

270 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 16.

271 Sigmund Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969/1926), 16–17.

272 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 19.

273 Sigmund Freud, "Formulations Regarding the Two Principles in Mental Functioning," in *General Psychological Theory: Papers in Metapsychology*, trans. M.N. Searl (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1991/1911), 2–3.

274 See e.g. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 19.

275 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: CUP, 1999/1872). See also e.g. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1974/1882), 327–331 (§370).

giving power. The Dionysian frenzy is, so to speak, harnessed, shaped, and dignified by the Apollonian force.[276]

However, in contrast to the Apollonian element in Nietzsche's scheme of things, the Freudian ego is ultimately not what it appears to be. Rather than being an autonomous agency, it is in fact a front for the underlying passions of the id:

> [T]here is nothing of which we are more certain than the feeling of our self, of our own ego. This ego appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else. That such an appearance is deceptive, and that on the contrary the ego is continued inwards, without any sharp delimitation, into an unconscious mental entity which we designate as the id and for which it serves as a façade—this was a discovery first made by psycho-analytic research[.][277]

Such a view can be considered to be in line with Hume's position that reason is always "the slave of the passions," although Freud does not make the normative claim of Hume that reason "ought only to be" such slave.[278] However, it is puzzling that Freud undermines the conception of the ego as having a unifying impact, because his description of the ego certainly suggests such organising function.

The formation of the superego begins when a child internalises the standards of authoritative figures, usually the standards of parents that in turn reflect the standards of the larger community.[279] The superego generates judgements of a higher order than the ego and there are two sides to it: one's conscience that penalises improper demeanour, even if nobody else is watching, and one's "ego ideal" that rewards proper demeanour. Jonathan Lear is precise and on point when he defines the superego as follows: "the superego functions as a voice of conscience, an image of ideals, and as a punishing judge and censor. It typically represses the wishes of the id and inhibits the desires of the ego."[280] The superego is partly subconscious, like the id, and partly conscious, like the ego. People's subconsciousness is mainly a mix of id elements and superego elements, while people's consciousness is only a mix of ego elements and superego elements, so the id is the only element that does not enter one's

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276 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1968/1889), 114 ("Expeditions of an Untimely Man," §49). Walter Kaufmann is keen to point out that the Dionysian faith in Nietzsche's later writings was not a reference to 'the deity of formless frenzy'; rather, it stood for the synthesis of the original Dionysian and Apollonian elements: the former had in fact absorbed the latter (*Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: PUP, 1974), 129).

277 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010/1930), 26.

278 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Penguin Books, 1969/1738–40), 462.

279 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 25.

280 Jonathan Lear, *Freud*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015/2005), 220–221.

direct awareness unfiltered. The superego condemns both the id and the ego, but as the id is not recognisable as a responsible agency, the whole tension is played out between the super-ego and the ego. The tension brings about the emotions of anxiety and guilt in a person, either on the subconscious or the conscious level. Freud links the superego to ethics and religion—and he emphasises its civilizational role:

> What means does civilization employ in order to inhibit the aggressiveness which opposes it, to make it harmless, to get rid of it, perhaps? . . . This we can study in the history of the development of the individual. . . . His aggressiveness is introjected, internalized; it is, in point of fact, sent back to where it came from—that is, it is directed towards his own ego. There it is taken over by a portion of the ego, which sets itself over against the rest of the ego as super-ego, and which now, in the form of "conscience," is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individuals. The tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it, is called by us the sense of guilt; it expresses itself as a need for punishment.[281]

If the activity of the superego does not succeed in preventing unacceptable thoughts and actions, so that a high level of tension and anxiety is preserved, individuals are likely to subconsciously resort to defence mechanisms, for example by blocking events from their awareness (denial), by attributing motives to others (projection), or by satisfying an impulse with a socially acceptable substitute (sublimation). The superego functions as a harsh master, often resulting in all sorts of psychological distress and complications, but when such internal authority is underdeveloped, as is prone to happen when children grow up without affection, the aggressiveness that would have been directed inwards is likely to be directed outwards, resulting in violence or abuse against others.[282]

Freud's structural model of selfhood has now been sufficiently explained in order to compare it to Kierkegaard's outlook—and brief references to well-known philosophers have served to cast further light on the ideas in question and how they relate to the history of philosophy. The first feature to which attention should be drawn, is how well Freud's triad of *id–ego–superego* corresponds to Kierkegaard's triad of *immediacy–first self–deeper self*.

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281 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 114.

282 Ibid., 124. A tripartite view of the self is not new to philosophy; it reaches back to the foundational texts of the Western tradition, the Platonic dialogues, as was mentioned in §1.3. In spite of superficial similarities between Plato's tripartite theory and Freud's structural model, there are fundamental differences. The appetitive part can be considered within the category of the id, but the rational part can correspond to both the ego and the superego, and the spirited part can correspond to portion of the id, as well as being the result of the tension between the ego and the superego.

The concept of immediacy was introduced in the first section of this chapter as a state in which no self exists, the natural condition of human beings, both pre-linguistic ancients and pre-linguistic infants, to which no genuine human agency can be ascribed. As will be addressed in relation to the aesthetic sphere and the figure of Don Juan in chapter three, natural instincts and sensuous desires are the dominant drives of the immediacy, which continues to be a subconscious aspect of selfhood in a linguistic and reflective mode of living, although a trait that can be either suppressed or expressed to various degrees.[283] This description could be applied unaltered to the concept of id. The id element shares with the immediacy element the quality of being the only component of personality that is present from the beginning of human life—and their nature is very similar, if not completely identical, representing the side of individuals that has to do with instinctive desires, hedonism, and primitive energy.

The first self, in Kierkegaard's scheme of things, represents the emergence of consciousness and a sense of freedom, in other words the development of human agency, where immediacy becomes a subconscious element in a reflective and potentially rational mode of living. This description could easily qualify as a characterisation of the ego. It is noteworthy that Freud maintains that the ego, without a developed superego, is closely connected to the underlying passions of the id, to the extent of being its front; that is to say, its conscious representation. Such depiction is in concordance with Kierkegaard's apparent scepticism, that the first self-element, without a developed deeper self-element, should be referred to as a proper self, in spite of the spirit having been actualised through a qualitative leap. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Freud is keen to associate the ego with the "external world" and being shaped by "real circumstances in the outer wold," which correlates with Kierkegaard's account of the first self in its struggle with the deeper self, as is evident from the paragraphs quoted above on the conflict of the self-elements. Even the timing of the emergence of the ego within individuals, namely within one year of their birth, coincides with the timing of the emergence of the first self, according to my interpretation of Kierkegaard, because the very first stages of language acquisition take place within the first year of infant's life. In both cases, self-consciousness develops gradually from that period.

The deeper self, according to Kierkegaard, is a process in which subjectivity and inwardness are advanced, so that one's consciousness and sense of freedom are increased—and from which one gains perspective on the first self-element, including its role of fronting the id and the instincts of desire and self-preservation. The deeper self's urge to control the first self

[283] See §3.3.1.

and to withdraw from the world, in a way that can be variously world-rejecting or world-affirming, signifies an agency where ethical and religious considerations have become a factor. This description is a good match for the superego, which generates judgements of a higher order than the ego—and which Freud explicitly links to ethics and religion. It is noteworthy that Freud not only grants the superego the role of penalising improper behaviour, but also of posing an ideal for the individual. Such a procedure is reminiscent of Kierkegaard's notion of the "ideal self," which I will address in the next section on the relational view of selfhood. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the superego is the final element in the self-constitution in the same way as the deeper self.

However, the development of the final self-element is not the end of fundamental self-development, neither for Freud nor Kierkegaard, because they both anticipate an inner struggle between the ego and the super ego, in the case of the former, and between the first self and the deeper self, in the case of the latter. In Freud, this is a conflict between elements that partly reach one's direct consciousness, while the id is wholly subconscious, and only takes part in the conflict indirectly through the ego. Likewise, the immediacy element of natural instincts has disappeared to the background in Kierkegaard's scheme of things, while at the same time being championed by the first self in the conflict with the deeper self. Note that in the reconciliation paragraphs that I have already quoted, "the first self submits to the deeper self" (EUD 316) so that selfhood loses portion of its "burning desire" (EUD 317). Note also the little secret which seals the reconciliation, namely the awareness that the profound volatility and impermanence of everything worldly render human beings vulnerable. This can be compared to Freud's claim that it will result in all sorts of pathologies if the superego does not develop properly and fulfil its role. Yet, it is important to observe that Freud considers that the superego, in its function as a "harsh master," can create pathologies on its own, distress and complications—which corresponds well to Kierkegaard's concept of despair, which I will discuss in chapter three.[284] Just as Freud is acutely aware of the ambivalent nature of the superego, the ambivalence of the deeper self does not escape Kierkegaard. With regard to anxiety there might be a minor difference between the two thinkers, as anxiety of some sort begins earlier in Kierkegaard's framework, even before the emergence of the first self, but the difference may at least partly result from different conceptions of anxiety. For Freud, the tension between the two conscious self-elements brings about anxiety, while Kierkegaard views anxiety as a consequence of a

[284] See §3.2.

confrontation with either one's nothingness or one's freedom. Guilt also results from the inner tension, according to Freud, and Kierkegaard is essentially in agreement, as he considers guilt to result from the development of an ethical and religious sensibility of the deeper self: such awareness clashes with the first self-element and eventually perceives its own shortcomings, creating a sense of guilt.

The insights about Kierkegaard's philosophy of the self that have been gained in this section—with help of Freud's structural model—are crucial in order to sufficiently understand Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming. First, I consider myself to have established that self-becoming fundamentally consists in a proper development of the self-elements. In this regard, the immediacy element is not an issue, because it represents a natural precondition. The first self and the deeper self, however, undergo a self-constituting development and struggle, the outcome of which determines one's second nature—that is to say, the nature of the self that one becomes. In *Postscript*, Climacus states the following regarding the task of every individual: "Ethics focuses upon the individual, and ethically understood it is every individual's task to become a whole human being, just as it is the presupposition of ethics that everyone is born in the state of being able to become that" (CUP-I 346) With reference to what has been explained in this section, I claim that the task of becoming a "whole human being" is essentially the task of properly developing the self-elements—and therefore the task of self-becoming. What such a task consists of will be gradually disclosed in the rest of this thesis.

Secondly, my analysis in this section can illuminate an important feature of Kierkegaard's authorship that I brought up in chapter one: its dialectical quality; the pluralism that is inherent in it. The clue is to be found in the conflict between the first self and the deeper self. Although the superego is successfully developed in Freudian psychology, a person's character depends a lot on the outcome of the conflict between the superego and the ego, how they synthesise into a whole—and the ego can to certain extent assert itself against the authority of the superego, without necessarily damaging the tension and restraint that exemplifies well-functioning self-constitution. Likewise, in the philosophy of Kierkegaard, the first self can assert itself against the authority of a successfully developed deeper self, while preserving the balance of power that is important for one's well-being. The content of one's character ultimately depends on the reconciliation between the self-elements, their power relations. In chapter three I will argue that the first self is predominant in an aesthetic mode of living, while the deeper self is predominant in an ethical and religious mode of living. Furthermore, I will argue that Kierkegaard is neutral between these options as a poet-

philosopher, although it is fair to say that he took a personal stance in favour of the deeper self, especially in his last years. In interpreting *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* one must take into account that it is part of Kierkegaard's religious undertaking, so it is not surprising that the deeper self has the upper hand in that work.

It is important to keep in mind that even though I am depicting Kierkegaard's frame of the self as a proto-Freudian structure, I am not claiming that Freud's structural model is nearly indistinguishable to Kierkegaard's framework, but rather that the former is close enough to Kierkegaard's ideas in order to cast light on them and indicate solutions to baffling aspects.[285] In spite of interesting similarities, the approach of the two thinkers is radically different, as J. Preston Cole rightly observes in *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud*: "In a way they are polar opposites, each providing an entirely different perspective on man. Freud has approached his study from a naturalistic perspective, and Kierkegaard from an historistic perspective."[286] However, it is not accurate to describe Kierkegaard's approach as "historistic." Surely, he had a historical dimension, as can be seen from the first section of this chapter on immediacy and the emergence of language, but a more accurate description is the one I provided in the first chapter on the moderate theatrical reading of Kierkegaard and his vocation as a poet-philosopher. In short, he is more attuned to the challenges of existence than to speculative theorising—and his frame of the self is not put forward as a scientific or semi-scientific doctrine, but rather as reflection on people's subjective reality, conducive to their self-awareness and self-advancement.

The way in which I have compared Kierkegaard and Freud for explanatory purposes does not have a blueprint in scholarship, but comparison between the two thinkers is not new—and a few notable books and papers have been written on the topic.[287] Cole's work was just mentioned, but another one is Kresten Nordentoft's *Kierkegaard's Psychology* which deals extensively with Freud. According to him, Freud's triad of id-ego-superego "corresponds

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285 Freud was born in 1856, approximately six months after Kierkegaard's death. Freud was an avid reader of Nietzsche, but it is not known that he read anything by Kierkegaard. However, Kierkegaard's works and ideas had become part of the intellectual milieu in Vienna during Freud's life in the city and it is not unlikely that he was at least exposed to Kierkegaard's philosophy to some extent.

286 J. Preston Cole, *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971), 55.

287 Scholars whose intellectual horizon includes good understanding of both Freud and Kierkegaard are numerous, not least because of the influence of Jacques Lacan, who was a 20th century Freudian psychoanalyst with much interest in Kierkegaard. See e.g. "Beyond Anxiety: The Witch's Letter" by Samuel Weber in his *Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Michael Levine (Cambridge: CUP, 1991/1978), 152–167; and "Kierkegaard as a Freudian Questioner of the Soul *avant la lettre*," by J.D. Mininger, which is the chapter on Kierkegaard and Lacan in *Kierkegaard's Influence on the Social Sciences* (vol. 13 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 195–216. Žižek is also a Lacanian psychoanalyst.

quite well" to Kierkegaard's concepts of desire, reflection, and spirit.[288] Desire is indeed a core feature of both the id and immediacy, and reflection is without doubt a core feature of the ego and the first self, but according to my reading, spirit is a bad match for the superego. Rather, spirit contains both of the conscious self-elements, so that the development of the spirit is synonymous to the development of the first self and the deeper self, which again is synonymous to self-becoming. As I have previously argued, the beginning of selfhood is the beginning of spirit. In a more recent paper, René Larson follows Nordentoft in identifying the spirit with the superego. He accounts for the id as "the unconscious and the relationship to the drives," the ego as "reason and the relationship to reality, and the superego as "morality and the relationship to social reality."[289] Such account is not wrong, but it highlights the serious shortcomings of associating the Freudian superego with the Kierkegaardian spirit. It reminds us that Freud operates entirely within an immanent outlook and religion for him is something to be studied as part of social reality. For Kierkegaard, however, "morality and the relationship to social reality" would only capture features of ethical development, while religion reaches beyond social reality, towards transcendence and towards truth that is alien to those who operate within a conceptual frame of reference defined by social reality.

In any case, an aspect of the superego that corresponds well to an aspect of the spirit, in which the deeper self has developed, is the function of producing an ideal for the whole self-constitution. Kierkegaard's notion of the "ideal self" is such a function of the spirit. As George Stack makes clear in his paper "Repetition in Kierkegaard and Freud," the notion of the ideal self is closely connected to Kierkegaard's concept of repetition—and the rest of this chapter will cast light on that connection.[290]

2.3 Relational view of selfhood

2.3.1 Existential topography of subjectivity

In the previous sections of this chapter I have prepared the ground for commentary on the notoriously obscure and bewildering lines at the beginning of *Sickness unto Death*:

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288 Kersten Nordentoft, *Psychology of Kierkegaard*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1978), 40. Nordentoft's book was originally written and published in Danish (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1972). Nordentoft's focus in this regard is on *Either/Or*. See also David J. Gouwens, "Kierkegaard's Either/Or, Part One: Patterns of Interpretation", in *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Vol. 3: Either/Or, Part I*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 26.

289 René Larson, "Assessing the Superego and Spirit: Common Characteristics of the Self in Kierkegaard and Freud," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1, no. 5 (May 2011): 166.

290 George J. Stack, "Repetition in Kierkegaard and Freud," *The Personalist* 58, no. 3 (1977): 252. Freudian repetition, however, is very different from the Kierkegaardian variety. The "only mode of repetition identified by Freud," as Stack observes, is "a neurotic, repetitious compulsion to repeat the past or patterns of past behaviour" (255). See e.g. §2.3.4.

> 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 relations' 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. (SUD 13)

An account of Kierkegaard's philosophy of the self is often centred upon this passage and the relational view of selfhood that is expressed in it, as well as in the rest of *Sickness*. The self-becoming process that Kierkegaard envisions is grounded in the contemplation on the structure of the self. In construing the passage, there are two excesses to be avoided. On the one hand, it should be ruled out that the passage does not represent Kierkegaard's outlook, either because it is intended to be a parody of cryptic speculative thought and should therefore not be taken seriously, or because it should only be attributed to the pseudonymous author of *Sickness*, Anti-Climacus. There is no evidence for the former contention—and the whole book depends on the opening passage in question, so if it is nothing but a parody, the rest of the book is reduced to an insignificant jest, which is not plausible. The latter contention has already been refuted in this chapter: there is an agreement on the nature of the self, across pseudonyms—and the views expressed in *Sickness* echo the views expressed in, for example, *Repetition* and *Concept of Anxiety*.[292]

On the other hand, one should avoid an interpretation according to which Kierkegaard would be turned into some sort of a speculative theorist with metaphysical underpinnings. The *Sickness* passage has been the centrepiece of much effort to construct an ontology of selfhood which is supposed to underlie Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works and constitute their fundamental meaning.[293] John Elrod, for example, states in the introduction to his work, *Being and Existence in Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Works*, that "the concept of the self in the pseudonyms provides a philosophical principle of unity which enabled Kierkegaard to develop a coherent, systematic, and unified view of human existence."[294] There is a sense in which that is the case, as will be made evident, but it must be understood in line with what was established regarding Kierkegaard as a poet-philosopher in the first chapter. His focus is on the subjective dimension from the first-person perspective, the challenges of existing,

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[292] See §2.1.1.

[293] Secondary literature where this applies includes Calvin O. Schrag's *Existence and Freedom: Towards an Ontology of Human Finitude* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1961); Mark C. Taylor's *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1975); John W. Elrod's *Being and Existence in Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Works* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1975); and George J. Stack's *Kierkegaard's Existential Ethics* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1977).

[294] Elrod, *Being and Existence*, 9.

but he is constantly wary of the tendency to reduce individual existence to a philosophical system. This is the context of the statement in *Postscript* that "modern speculative thought has mustered everything to enable the individual to transcend himself objectively," but that "this just cannot be done," because "existence exercises its constraint" (CUP-I 197). In explaining these words, Schönbaumsfeld draws attention to the fact that existence, where real decisions between alternatives have to be made, is not as "accommodating" as pure thought:

> [A]s Climacus repeatedly points out in CUP, anything is possible in "pure thought," even, allegedly, cancelling the principle of contradiction. Existence, however, is not as accommodating; there is nothing in between to be and not to be. The ongoing process of existing—what Kierkegaard's pseudonyms call the process of "becoming"—cannot therefore be fitted into timeless metaphysical categories except by dint of denying the existence of our selves altogether.[295]

However, the question remains how the *Sickness* passage should be understood, if not as a speculative theory. Calvin O. Schrag's concept of an "existential topography," as well as E. C. Tolman's concept of "cognitive mapping," could be invoked in this context.[296] It is not farfetched to hold that Kierkegaard is engaging in some sort of topography or mapping of the self for practical purposes, so that he is describing his view of selfhood, based on his introspection and his intellectual horizon, as well as inviting readers to interrogate their own lives in search of such features. Such a perspective would be fully in line with the Kierkegaardian theatre of ideas that I accounted for in the first chapter.[297] It would also be in agreement with the view of John J. Davenport, who describes the methodology in *Sickness* as "practical phenomenology," based on "practical experience," and which is demonstrated by what he calls "psychological evidence."[298] He also correctly observes that the Dane should not be understood as offering "metaphysics of self-identity."[299] I will use the term "existential topography," as "practical phenomenology" could have misleading connotations of the

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295 Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres*, 47.

296 See §1.3; Schrag, *Existence and Freedom*, 9; Tolman, "Cognitive maps in rats and men," 189 et al.

297 See §1.1.2.

298 John Davenport, "Selfhood and 'Spirit,'" ch. 12 in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, eds. John Lippitt and George Pattison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 233.

299 Ibid. Phenomenology was founded by Edmund Husserl and it is generally defined as a philosophical study of structures of experience and consciousness. More specifically, Dermot Moran, in his *Introduction to Phenomenology*, defines phenomenology as a "radical, anti-traditional style of philosophising, which emphasises the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe *phenomena*, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer." Dermot Moran (2000), *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Abington: Routledge, 2000), 4. Ontology, however, is strictly speaking not a study of what appears to be, but what is, as its name suggests (logos of being). Martin Heidegger describes his method as phenomenological and his account of the self is commonly accepted to be much inspired by Kierkegaard's writings, particularly in *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010/1927).

theorising of 20th century phenomenologists. Kierkegaard's topography of the self can also be described as the activity of mapping the substratum of subjectivity.

With regard to Kierkegaard's intellectual horizon in relation to his topography of the self, it must be mentioned that Hegel had a huge impact on the young Dane and his attitude towards Hegel can be divided into three main periods, as Jon Stewart observes: first, a period where Hegel features positively, then a three year period of polemics against Hegelian philosophy, and finally a period where Kierkegaard's writings do not deal with Hegelianism at all.[300] Stewart considers *Sickness* to be the exception of the last period "insofar as it displays a profound familiarity with Hegel's dialectical method and in this aspect can be regarded as being positively influenced by Hegel."[301] However, Hegel's name never appears in *Sickness* and although the work has the Hegelian aroma Stewart mentions, the work is plausibly better understood in another context, namely as a criticism of the classical conception of the self, most importantly that of Plato, and a suggestion of another picture of selfhood, as I will soon explain. The new picture of selfhood is closer to Hegel than to the classical one, but the main reason is that both Hegel and Kierkegaard favour a perspective on selfhood which can be regarded as developing from aspects of the Christian tradition. The context of Christianity is brought up by Hubert Dreyfus, who maintains that Kierkegaard is attempting to discover the structure of the self, influenced by Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*, according to which the self has a firm structure, although no rigid nature.[302] However, although Kierkegaard may have been partly inspired by Pascal there is no evidence of substantial influence. The best way to view Kierkegaard's philosophy of the self is to view it as an original philosophical analysis of the topographical sort that I have suggested, influenced by the Christian tradition in which he was soaked.[303]

The same applies to the previous sections of this chapter—and there is full continuity between the relational view of selfhood in *Sickness* and what has earlier been established about immediacy, the spirit, the first self, the deeper self, et cetera. In stark contrast to, for example, Boven, who claims that "Kierkegaard does not have a unified theory of the self,"[304] I contend that his body of work expresses a unified view of the self, although it is better not to call it a

300 Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 597-615.

301 Ibid., 613.

302 Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Kierkegaard on the Self," in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard*, ed. Edward F. Mooney (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 12; see also Blaise Pascal, *Pascal Pensées* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, 1958), 28.

303 It supports such an interpretation that Anti-Climacus, the pseudonymous author of *Sickness*, is a genuine Christian according to Kierkegaard.

304 Boven, "A Theater of Ideas," 117.

theory. I am not suggesting that Kierkegaard's philosophy of the self does not somewhat develop throughout his career, which is probably the case, but rather that the various descriptions of selfhood add up to a coherent picture of selfhood. Boven also maintains that Kierkegaard's pseudonyms nevertheless "all start from the same basic premise" that "the self has a temporal structure that is paradoxical in nature."[305] The structure is indeed temporal, as will be discussed in subsection 2.3.6 below, but it is not accurately described as paradoxical. Rather, the self is composed of conflicting elements—and the self is to a large extent shaped by the internal struggle.

2.3.2 Spirit's relation to the psychical and the physical

The *Sickness* passage begins by identifying the spirit with the self: "A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self." As I have argued, the self in question is the self that emerges after the state of immediacy. Initially it is the first self, but gradually it develops a deeper self and the conflict between the two self-elements shape the self and its character. It is important to note that the very first sentence does not identify the spirit with the whole human being, as it might appear to do, but rather identifies the spirit with the *humanness* of a human being. In other words, Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacus is stating that the emergence of spirit brings the proper human condition, so that pre-linguistic individuals, no matter whether primordial people or infants, only potentially qualify as humans.[306]

It is hard, if not impossible, to offer a clear-cut definition of Kierkegaard's concept of spirit. The Danish term, *Aand*, has the same etymological root as "breath." The correct context is to be found in the creation story in Genesis where God forms the human being "of the dust of the ground," where God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," so that a human being became a living creature."[307] The last word, "creature" is variously translated as "soul"—and this part of Genesis is the ultimate ground for the tripartite view in Christian theology, according to which human beings consist of three components: body, soul, and spirit. In Martin Luther's view, which Kierkegaard must have been familiar with, the spirit is "the highest, deepest, noblest part of man, by which he is able to grasp incomprehensible, invisible, and eternal things."[308] From such a theological origin, the term "spirit" began to

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305 Ibid.

306 This invites the criticism that pre-linguistic individuals are being dehumanised. Although such a point is valid, it doesn't follow that potential humans should necessarily have any fewer rights than those in whom the potential quality has been actualised.

307 Gen. 2:7. *The Lutheran Study Bible: English Standard Version*, ed. Edward A. Engelbrecht (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 16. See also James Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1983/1953), 259–60.

308 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 21, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 303.

acquire denotations and connotations which are carefully documented in Marcia Morgan's account of the Danish lexical meaning of spirit: "*Aand* may be conjoined with *liv* and *kraft* to mean spiritual life and spiritual power, respectively[.] . . . It may refer to a higher consciousness in contrast to soul; a person distinguished as a personality; a rational being made without a body; an all-powerful force intended to act in the human being (holy spirit); a mood; and a volatile substance or essence."[309] These are ideas about the spirit that were floating around in Copenhagen's intellectual landscape during Kierkegaard's time. Moreover, the term had entered into the philosophical mainstream through Hegelian idealism, where Lutheran roots were apparent. As is stressed by Frederick Beiser, the notion of spirit is "the central motif of Hegel's system"—and according to his definition of the Hegelian spirit, the simplest synonym for its "most common use" would plainly be "the self."[310] Furthermore, Beiser adds that "Hegel sometimes uses spirit to designate the realm of subjectivity in contrast to objectivity or organic nature"—and that in such instances, the "spirit refers to the defining characteristics of rationality and subjectivity, namely self-consciousness and freedom."[311] I have already pointed out that Kierkegaard is not repeating Hegel's system in his existential topography and their conception of spirit is certainly not the same, for example due to the latter's historicism. However, there are clear similarities. Kierkegaard, via Anti-Climacus, identifies the spirit as the self in *Sickness* (SUD 13), or to be more precise, the active structuring force of the self, as opposed the substantial self for which the spirit takes responsibility, as will be explained.[312] He also, via Climacus, identifies the spirit as consciousness in *De Omnibus* (DO 169), and by consciousness he is normally referring to self-consciousness, as will be addressed.[313] It must be noted that *De Omnibus* is a posthumously published work, so it cannot be conclusively cited as evidence, but the strong union between the two concepts is obvious by how the terms are used in various published works, as will be become evident before the end of this chapter.[314] Furthermore, via Haufniensis, Kierkegaard identifies the spirit as freedom (CA 91). It is not the case that different pseudonyms have dissimilar understanding of spirit, because a close conceptual analysis reveals that these definitions of spirit merge in Kierkegaard's multifaceted understanding of spirit. I do not

309 Marcia Morgan, "Spirit," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome VI: Salvation to Writing* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2016), 75. See also *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1918–56), vol. 1, cols. 33–38.

310 Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 110 and 320.

311 Ibid., 320.

312 See §§2.3.4–2.3.5.

313 See §2.3.4. The translation is "Consciousness is mind," but the word that Climacus uses is *Aand*, which is Kierkegaard's term for the spirit.

314 See e.g. George J. Stack, "Kierkegaard: The Self and Ethical Existence," *Ethics* 83, no. 2 (1973): 119; and Elrod, *Being and Existence*, 43–53.

claim that he uses the terms in the same sense as Hegel, but I do claim that the simplest way to define Kierkegaard concept of spirit is by referring to self-consciousness and freedom, as the active structuring force of selfhood—where an accentuation should be put on *active*, in the sense of activity, in contrast to both passivity and spiritlessness.[315]

The *Sickness* passage accounts for the spirit as the component of a human being that 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." In order to unravel these lines, let us think about two factors, (X) and (Y), as well as the relation between them, (R). The self, or (S), is the third factor, not as (R), as is initially stated before the correction, but as the active process of (R)'s "relating itself to itself," which is another way of signifying self-consciousness, as I will explain in subsection 2.3.4 below. That is to say, (R) becomes self-conscious and separates itself qualitatively from (R) through the feature of being self-conscious. In this regard, it should be observed that the self is fundamentally *relational* rather than being an underlying thing or an entity: there is no self-substance, although such substance emerges through the activity of the spirit.

Now, the question must be answered as to what the other two components are, namely factors (X) and (Y). The *Sickness* passage continues with a description of the synthesis that constitutes the relational nature of the self: "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." So, on the one hand there are elements that can be associated with transcendence in the Kantian sense—infinitude, eternity, and freedom—while on the other hand there are elements that can be associated with immanence—finitude, temporality, and necessity. As will become evident in subsequent subsections, Kierkegaard's discussion in *Sickness* suggests that he could have been more precise in the terms he chooses at this point, because "possibility" would have been more fitting in this context than "freedom," and "time" more fitting than "temporality." In any case, the two sides of the synthesis which have been characterised as transcendental and immanent must represent some basic components of a human being—and a clearer picture emerges in the paragraph that immediately follows the *Sickness* passage: "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

[315] The definition does not need to be made more complicated for my purposes, but the nature of the self-consciousness and freedom in question will be made clear, especially in §§2.3.4–2.3.5. The comparison to Hegel in this regard is only a starting point and it is outside of my task to engage in a comparative analysis in which the similarities and differences between them are explained.

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" (SUD 13). It can be inferred from the paragraph that components (X) and (Y) are on the one hand the psyche, which is synonymous to the soul or the mind in Kierkegaard's terminology, and on the other hand the body. So, the synthesis is between the psychical factors of infinitude, eternity, and possibility, on the one hand, and the physical factors of finitude, time, and necessity, on the other hand. This is in line with Davenport's interpretation of Kierkegaard's philosophy of the self:

> Here, as many commentators have noted, pairs of binary opposites are associated with the poles of a hylomorphic synthesis—finitude, necessity, and temporality are associated with embodiment (and thus with situatedness in a time, place, and society), while infinity, possibility, and eternity are associated with soul or mind. By contrast, "spirit" or the self it forms is a *reflexive structure* that transcends the first-order relation of hylomorphic or animal unity between these poles.[316]

However, Davenport's term of "hylomorphic synthesis" is a reference to hylomorphism, a theory of Aristotle according to which objects are "complexes of matter and form."[317] I am far from convinced that Kierkegaard relies on such a notion in his existential topography—and it is puzzling why infinitude and eternity are regarded as features of the psyche. The reason might be theological: that humans are made in God's image and therefore have divine qualities as part of their basic constitution. If one insists on a philosophical explanation, which is my inclination in this thesis, one could say that the ability to infinitise and eternalise is part of people's second nature, resulting from their linguistic and rational capacity.[318] Such reading is attractive because the topography of the self becomes philosophically intelligible, without the need to resort to theological doctrines or controversial metaphysical theories. However, the problem with it is obvious: the second nature stems from the emergence of the spirit and its development, but not from the psyche. In order to let the view I am suggesting work, one has to bypass the problem by either presuming that the spirit somehow projects these qualities on the psyche, or simply presuming that the synthesis is between a body-psyche entity, on the one hand, and the spirit on the other hand, while the self-conscious spirit consists in that relation simultaneously relating itself to itself. In any case, it is an existential topography that is influenced by Christianity, as I have suggested.

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316 Davenport, "Selfhood and 'Spirit,'" 235. Davenport replaces Kierkegaard's term of freedom for possibility, in the same way as I do, but he doesn't replace temporality with time.

317 Christopher Shields, *Aristotle*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 65.

318 In this respect, see also my commentary on the chariot analogy in §2.3.7.

The distinction that is made between the self and the psyche can be explained by reference to my earlier discussion of the state of immediacy, where I quoted the following lines from *Concept of Anxiety*: "In innocence, man is not qualified as spirit but is psychically qualified in immediate unity with his natural condition. The spirit in man is dreaming" (CA 41). In Lowrie's earlier translation "psychically qualified" was rendered "soulishly determined."[319] So, it can be inferred that the psyche belongs to immediacy, according to Kierkegaard—and the "negative unity" mentioned in the paragraph following the *Sickness* passage is the unity of the psyche and the body in the state of immediacy. This unity is "psychically qualified" or "soulishly determined," stripped of the self-consciousness and freedom brought by the emergence of the spirit, or the self, which constitutes the "positive third" component in the paragraph. After the positive third emerges, the body and the psyche become parts of the subconscious immediacy element in the triad of immediacy–first self–deeper self. This makes sense, as it would be crude to identify the state of immediacy simply with the sensuous body, without any mental aspect. The inferences I have made in this regard are not original; they are common in secondary literature. Cole and Elrod are, for example, unequivocal in making the connection I have made between the notion of immediacy in *Concept of Anxiety* and the body-psyche relation in *Sickness*—and Cole refers to the latter as "psychosomatic entity," which is a term I will adopt.[320] However, if I am correct, Howard and Edna Hong make incorrect comments on the paragraph in question in their editorial endnotes to their translation, because they link the "negative unity" to the first self, rather than to immediacy, and link the "positive third" to the deeper self, rather than to the whole self as spirit, in which the deeper self is an element.[321]

In the context of the relation between the psychosomatic entity and the spirit, it is worth mentioning the distinction William James makes later in the 19th century between what he calls the "me-self" and the "I-self."[322] The distinction is based on the difference between the self as an object of experience, namely the me-self, and the self as a conscious subject of experience, namely the I-self. James's distinction can be compared to the contrast between the psychosomatic entity and the spirit, as can be implied from the following account of Cole: "Spirit continually projects itself as a possible mode of being, disturbing the passive unity of the psychosomatic entity, and tempting it to become responsible for itself. When the

319 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread* (CA-L), ed. and trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1968), 37.
320 Cole, *The Problematic Self*, 15–16; Elrod, *Being and Existence*, 39–40.
321 Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, notes to *The Sickness unto Death*, 174 (n3 and n4 to part one).
322 See William James (1890), *Principles of Psychology* (New York, NY: Dover Publishers), ch. 10, 291-401.

relation actualizes this possibility, it has made the transition from an 'it' to an 'I'; it has become a self."

Dreyfus contrasts the relational view of selfhood to the ancient Greek dualistic structure of the self as a combination of soul and body, in a way that can cast some light on the concerns that Kierkegaard is responding to in his existential topography:

> On the Greek account, if both sets of factors were equally essential the self would be in hopeless contradiction. It could not fully express all its bodily finite, temporal needs and capacities while at the same time fully expressing all its intellectual, infinite, eternal needs and capacities. It seems, in fact, that the more you express one set of factors, the less you are able to express the other set. So it would seem that the factors were merely *combined*, and only one set of factors could be essential.[323]

Plato is an early advocate of such dualism, even such a dualist to the extent that the soul, according to him, is independent of the body. Nowadays the position is called mind-body dualism, often associated with Cartesian dualism because of the early modern impact of Descartes.[324] In accordance with the tendency in mind-body dualism of regarding "only one set of factors" as "essential," both Plato and Descartes give primacy to the mental over the physical—and in Platonic dualism the latter is subordinated to the former. It is fair to say that Western philosophy became to a considerable degree mind-body dualistic, where the mental was regarded as superior to the physical, and it was a prominent view in the period Kierkegaard was active as an author. Contrary to how Christianity is often perceived, there has been a persistent strand within the Christian tradition that has resisted radical mind-body dualism. As Dreyfus mentions, Pascal is a good example of a Christian thinker who forcefully rejects such dualism and soul-preference. He argues that the proper Christian position is to view both elements as essential, as well as boldly claiming that if such a state of affairs leads to a contradiction the self simply has a contradictory structure. Pascal attempts to undermine a picture of selfhood that has arguably been damaging to people's worldview, because it has fostered fantasies of the mind and led to an unfruitful world-rejecting attitude. Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacus can be considered to be on the same battlefield as Pascal in this regard by emphasising the importance of both the psychical and the physical, as well as positing the spirit as a third component to dissolve the problems of a binary structure.

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323 Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Christianity Without Onto-Theology: Kierkegaard's Account of the Self's Movement from Despair to Bliss," in *Religion after Metaphysics*, ed. Mark A Wrathall (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 91.

324 See §2.2.1 where Cartesian dualism was briefly mentioned.

The physical elements stand for people's facticity and limitation, or as Rudd is correct in putting it, "their rootedness in the specificities of nature, society and history," while the mental elements stand for "our power of transcendence, our capacity for stepping back from ourselves to evaluate and change who we are."[325] Both sets of elements are vital parts of the synthesis that they are related to by the spirit. Kierkegaard recognises the value of the physical side, which connects us to the immanent or profane aspect of our reality, the source of all worldly value and differentiation. Without the physical elements, the self would be unsteady and out of touch, literally speaking. That aspect of selfhood should not be subordinated to the psychical elements, because then possibility would not be properly balanced by necessity—and the self would be too prone to fantasy, the opposite to the fatalism that results from a reverse subordination, as will soon be explained.[326]

In light of such existential topography, it is stated in the final sentence of the *Sickness* passage that "a human being is still not a self." Here, the self-concept is used in its thick sense, namely a proper self in which the deeper self is sufficiently developed—and where the synthesis has been dialectically arranged by the self, not once and for all, but by constantly sustaining and advancing a creative tension between different elements of our being. Through such self-becoming the human being becomes more concrete, more self-conscious, freer, more temporal—and by significant decisions and resolve, acquires definite character.

I will not directly analyse Kierkegaard's concept of becoming until the beginning of next chapter, but the remaining subsections of this chapter will be full of material that casts light on the meaning of the concept in relation to the self.

2.3.3 Concreteness between finitude and infinitude

Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacus states that "the self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, which can be done only through the relationship to God" (SUD 29–30).[327] The claim regarding the necessity of the God-relationship will be addressed in relation to the abyssal ground of freedom in chapter three. At this point, my focus is on the finitude–infinitude synthesis and its meaning for the self and its becoming. Note that Anti-Climacus asserts that the task of the self is to become

[325] Anthony Rudd, "Kierkegaard's Platonism and the Reasons of Love," in *Love, Reason and Will: Kierkegaard after Frankfurt*, ed. Anthony Rudd and John Davenport (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 252.

[326] Kierkegaard is therefore critical of the religious mystic who renounces the world. He associates such an attitude with fantasy or intoxicating and detrimental religiosity.

[327] Anti-Climacus also uses the ancient Greek terms for what is limited and unlimited to signify finitude and infinitude, namely πέρας (*péras*) for finitude and ἄπειρον (*apeiron*) for infinitude (SUD 35).

itself; it is not set forth as an option, but as an obligation. Considering the serious Christianity that Kierkegaard attributes to the pseudonym in question, the obligation can plausibly be read as a Christian duty, but it can also be understood as an ethical duty in the broad sense of the term: an existential duty to advance one's self. We are also soon informed that there are dire consequences to ignoring the task: "if the self does not become itself, it is in despair, whether it knows that or not" (SUD 30). Despair plays an important role in the process of self-becoming, but its spotlight will be in the next chapter.

In addressing the task, Anti-Climacus continues by explaining the meaning of the concept of self-becoming: "To become oneself is to become concrete. But to become concrete is neither to become finite nor to become infinite, for that which is to become concrete is indeed a synthesis. Consequently, the progress of the becoming must be an infinite moving away from itself in the infinitizing of the self, and an infinite coming back to itself in the finitizing process" (SUD 30). So, at least one manifestation of self-becoming is revealed as becoming concrete—and what it consists in is "neither to become finite nor to become infinite," but rather to synthesise the two aspects. What follows is puzzling and one can of course only wonder at this point what such spatial conceptual dichotomy can possibly mean in relation to becoming a self. The process seems to be described as a movement of expansion towards the infinite and then a movement of retraction back towards the finite. However, if one directs one's attention to spirit as self-consciousness, the solution to the conundrum becomes evident: expansion of self-consciousness must mean imagination, which again suggests the contemplation of possibilities and ideals. Such interpretation turns out to be correct—and it receives support from a nearby sentence: Anti-Climacus states that "the self is the synthesis of which the finite is the limiting and the infinite the extending constituent," and he then goes on to say that, "as a rule, imagination is the medium for the process of infinitizing" (SUD 30). He describes imagination as "the capacity *instar omnium* [for all capacities]," (SUD 31) and it can be applied to "feeling, knowing, and willing" (SUD 30). Kierkegaard's concept of imagination (*Indbildning*) plays an important role in his philosophy.[328] Its fundamental meaning is in line with the lexical meaning, namely the creative capacity for ideas, or to make new images in one's mind, instead of merely copying old ones. In relation to selfhood, the power of one's imagination (*Indbildingskraft*) expands one's existential horizon, the scope of what is meaningful and optimal, or as Elrod puts it, "imagination is the

[328] In addition to *Indbildning*, Kierkegaard uses the term *Phantasie* for imagination, which must be distinguished from the term *phantastisk*e, which refers to "the fantastic."

maker of infinity in the sense that it opens up the self's own horizon of meanings."[329] M. Jamie Ferreira, who has written extensively on Kierkegaard's concept of imagination as we mentioned in chapter one, correctly suggests that the imaginative activity should not be "restricted to the infinitizing movement," but that it should rather be regarded as "equally necessary for the process of finitising as well," as she explains: "in 'becoming' one is not only 'moving away from oneself *infinitely*,' but also 'returning to oneself infinitely'—and I suggest that to finitise yourself *infinitely* requires as much imagination as to infinitise yourself infinitely, because only imagination can do anything infinitely."[330] Moreover, she is right in pointing out that imagination is also needed for the effort of sustaining the tension between the elements of the synthesis: "it takes imagination to hold the finitised and infinitised selves in tension with each other."[331] However, it is questionable whether she is justified in talking about two selves in this respect. It is preferable to talk in terms of two movements of the self. In context of the first self-element and the deeper self-element, it is the latter element that is engaged in both movements, so the power of imagination ties in with the development of the deeper self, as will be further addressed in the next subsection on self-consciousness between reality and ideality.

A failure of imaginatively retracting towards the finite—that is to say, towards one's actual circumstances, the facts that constitute one's life—results in "the fantastic," according to Anti-Climacus (SUD 30): "When feeling or knowing or willing has become fantastic the entire self can eventually become that, whether in the more active form of plunging headlong into fantasy or in the more passive form of being carried away, but in both cases the person is responsible" (SUD 32). The responsibility not to dwell in fantasy, whether actively or passively comes with the freedom that the spirit brings.[332] Anti-Climacus describes the self that "leads a fantasised existence" as engaging in "abstract infinitizing" or being in "abstract isolation. It is abstract in the sense that the object of the imagination is not made *concrete* in one's actual existence, one's actuality. To make an idea or an ideal concrete is to give it a definite and particular form in one's life, which requires it to be made compatible with one's situation. The question of whether it is better to use the term "idea" or the term "ideal" in this context is not easy to answer: an idea is a broader category, referring to any thought or notion, while an ideal is loftier, signifying excellence or perfection. I will generally prefer the latter term, as it captures better the kind of ideas that Kierkegaard has in mind. A failure

329 Elrod, *Being and Existence*, 34.
330 Ferreira, *Transforming Vision*, 82.
331 Ibid.
332 See §2.3.5.

to make an ideal concrete results in the idea of remaining separated from one's actuality, so that it does not affect one's life, except negatively as a castle in the air and a diversion (SUD 32). Anti-Climacus chooses an example from the religious sphere in order to illustrate his point: "The God-relationship is an infinitizing, but in fantasy this infinitizing can so sweep a man off his feet that his state is simply an intoxication. To exist before God may seem unendurable to a man because he cannot come back to himself, become himself." (SUD 32). If the self does not make the movement back to the finite, it is lost to the void of infinitude—and "losing the self," according to Anti-Climacus, is "the greatest hazard of all" (SUD 32). What is lost is not the first self, but rather the proper self that relies on both the development of the deeper self and the creative struggle between the self-elements, a conflict in which the immediacy-element is indirectly included, as has been explained. To put the same point differently, what is lost is not the thin self, but rather the thick self that relies on a well-functioning synthesis between elements that are associated with the physical and the psychical.

The same applies of course to a failure to make the movement towards the infinite: the synthesis is halted, so that the process of self-becoming is halted—and a proper self does not develop. A failure to imaginatively expand one's horizon results in "despairing reductionism" or "narrowness," according to Anti-Climacus (SUD 33). The narrowness in question is evidently a narrow outlook of some sort—for example a limitation because of a tunnel vision or because of an inability to surpass crude materialism. Anti-Climacus states that he is only referring to "ethical narrowness and limitation," while he excludes "intellectual or aesthetic limitation," which he associates with a secular view (SUD 33). What he means by this is unclear. He might be using "ethical" in a broad sense, in order to make clear that he is concerned with existential issues relevant to the development of the self. However, if he is making a point in context of the existence-spheres—and excluding aesthetic concerns in favour of ethical and religious ones—it is arguably in such instances that the difference between Anti-Climacus and Kierkegaard becomes worthiest of consideration, in light of the former's outlook being more strictly Christian. In any case, Anti-Climacus is indirectly drawing attention to the various fields to which the narrowness can apply, although he claims to be concerned only with the ethical.

The narrow outlook that results from a lack of imagination is also described as a lack of "primitivity" (*Primitivitet*). As I mentioned in subsection 2.1.2, Kierkegaard does not use the concept of primitivity in its lexical sense of being pre-civilised or at an early stage of development, but rather as a reference to important vitality, part of which is a determination

in engaging in self-becoming. "Every human being," according to Anti-Climacus, "is primitively intended to be a self, destined to become himself, and as such every self certainly is angular, but that only means that it is to be ground into shape" (SUD 33). This can be interpreted as a natural urge to fulfil one's destiny, which might be the source of the above-mentioned duty to become oneself, so that along with being a Christian duty or an ethical duty broadly speaking, self-becoming can be viewed as the task to fulfil one's potential as a human being. Anti-Climacus seems to be indicating such a condition, not least by invoking destiny. The self is "angular" and needs to be "ground into shape," as he puts it. This brings us to an important question regarding Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming, namely whether the human self has a predestined shape, or whether the shaping is somehow teleological, so that it has a definite end-goal that can be discovered. As I made clear in chapter one, I do not consider his conception of self-becoming to include such an end-goal. The firmest opposition against it in Kierkegaard's writings is expressed by Climacus in *Postscript*, where the "process of becoming is described as "perpetual", along with the following clarification: "That the existing subjective thinker is continually striving does not mean, however, that in a finite sense he has a goal towards which he is striving, where he would be finished when he reached it. No, he is striving infinitely, is continually in the process of becoming" (CUP-I 91).[333] In commenting on these lines, Nordentoft insightfully notes that "the task with which one is presented, to become oneself, is not the movement from one fixed point to another." [334] He continues: "Kierkegaard does not operate with concept such as point of departure–goal, question–answer, beginning–conclusion, but with the idea of the absence of a result, inconclusiveness, a renewal of what is given."[335] I agree with him that this fundamental position should be attributed to Kierkegaard. However, he arguably contradicts himself when he invokes a plant-metaphor for self-development and likens it to an organic development, as will be addressed in the next chapter.[336]

However, in this regard an important distinction must be made. On the one hand, there is the self-structure which I have been accounting for in this chapter. The mechanism of that structure and its advancement can indeed be viewed as being organic in Kierkegaard's scheme of things, because its proper development is described in a way that lends itself to a comparison to a seed that is destined to become a fully-fledged flower. On the other hand, there is the

333 Anti-Climacus expresses the same view in *Sickness*: "In the life of the spirit there is no standing still [Stilstand] (really no state [Tilstand], either; everything is actuation)" (SUD 94).

334 Nordentoft, *Kierkegaard's Psychology*, 97.

335 Ibid.

336 Ibid., 92. For my discussion, see §3.1.

question of what the self becomes concretely, namely the ideas that are made concrete and thus become manifested in people's life—the particularities of their character, their vocation, their ambition, the skills they acquire; in short, all the manifested qualities of the thick self, the self-substance. The self-structure can indeed be described as organic, even as teleological, but the self-substance is neither organic nor teleological: it is engaged in perpetual development that is ultimately *free* and *open-ended*. Thus, there is no *telos* attached to self-becoming in the substantial sense, no end-goal to discover in the cosmos—and although providence can be trusted in faith, it cannot be consulted. One's destiny can be presupposed, but it is shaped by decisions and resolve, in which there is no way to escape uncertainties and contingency. In this sense, the self is engulfed in freedom, as will be further explained in subsection 2.3.5 on the spirit as freedom, as well as in chapter three on the abyss of becoming, where the abyssal ground of freedom will be explained.

The above-mentioned position by Climacus in *Postscript* that the process of becoming is perpetual is shared by Anti-Climacus in *Sickness*, which supports my argument that this position, as well as the framework associated with it, should be attributed to Kierkegaard: "every moment that a self exists," according to Anti-Climacus, "it is in a process of becoming, for the self κατὰ δύναμιν [in potentiality] does not actually exist," but is rather what "ought to come into existence" (SUD 30). What is perpetually becoming into existence is the thick self, the development of the deeper self and its interaction with other self-elements, the synthesis between the physical side and the psychical side, the advancement of self-consciousness and freedom, as well as all the substantial manifestations of the process in one's actual life. In this sense the self is constantly emerging as a concrete self, or "perpetually becoming into existence." The concrete self can therefore be described as gradually resulting from an interactive process between the infinitising movement and the finitising one. The groundwork for the process begins with language acquisition—although it is rooted in a development that already begins in a state of immediacy—and it does not end until the death or incapacitation of a human being, as I will address in the fourth and final chapter of this thesis.

2.3.4 Self-consciousness between reality and ideality

Implicit in my account of the synthesis between finitude and infinitude is the synthesis between reality and ideality. As one moves towards a concrete self through the former synthesis, one's self-consciousness is advanced through the latter. I have identified Kierkegaard's notion of the spirit with his concept of self-consciousness (*Selvbevidsthed*)—

and the concept has been used since the beginning of this chapter while only briefly being explained, but now it is time to establish its exact meaning in Kierkegaard's philosophical vocabulary.

Consciousness is a concept that is notoriously hard to define; it is usually explained in terms of synonyms or near-synonyms, such as awareness or perception, thus begging the question. David Chalmers, who has devoted his career to understanding consciousness, calls it "at once the most familiar thing in the world and the most mysterious"—and he observes that although "there is nothing we know about more directly than consciousness," there is no clarity on "how to reconcile it with everything else we know."[337] Chalmers draws attention to the definition offered in *The International Dictionary of Psychology*, which makes a distinction that is relevant to address in connection to Kierkegaard's terminology: "The having of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings; awareness. The term is impossible to define except in terms that are unintelligible without a grasp of what consciousness means. Many fall into the trap of confusing consciousness with self-consciousness—to be conscious it is only necessary to be aware of the external world."[338] Kierkegaard's references to consciousness in context of selfhood are normally references to self-consciousness, even when he skips the prefix "self" in front of the term. Even with regard to notions such as guilt-consciousness or consciousness of infinitude and eternity, the meaning might be best understood as self-consciousness of a sort. While consciousness is synonymous to awareness, self-consciousness can be described as a metacognition, namely awareness of awareness, or second-order awareness, or consciousness that is directed towards itself.[339] Consciousness of guilt or the psychical elements can hardly be described as simple awareness and is probably better categorised as a metacognition. It is outside of my task to discuss any further the specialised field of consciousness-studies within psychology or within philosophy of mind. Rather, my conceptual analysis is concerned with is the role that the notion of self-consciousness plays in Kierkegaard's existential topography.

Although *De Omnibus* must be relied on with caution as a posthumously published work, it is the best starting point in accounting for Kierkegaard's concept of self-consciousness. In the first section of this chapter, I quoted and explained a passage from *De Omnibus*, where immediacy is identified as reality and language as ideality, while consciousness is identified

337 David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), 3.

338 Ibid. See also N. S. Sutherland, ed., *The International Dictionary of Psychology* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1989).

339 The psychologist John H. Flavell coined the term "metacognition"; see his paper "Metacognitive Aspects of Problem Solving," in L. B. Resnick, ed., *The Nature of Intelligence* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1976), 231–236.

as a contradiction between reality and ideality (DO 168).[340] Accordingly, I have argued that consciousness emerges alongside language acquisition, according to Kierkegaard; that is to say, a properly human consciousness in contrast to the awareness that can be attributed to pre-linguistic humans as well as animals. Moreover, I have maintained that "contradiction" in this context is best understood as opposition, so that human consciousness develops in the opposition between reality and ideality that is generated by a linguistic mode of living. This is in line with the prevailing view in scholarship, for example captured by George Stack's claim that "the emergence of consciousness occurs when there is an awareness of the disparity between ideality and actuality."[341] However, "reality" is arguably a more exact term in this context than "actuality," as Kierkegaard associates actuality with a concrete synthesis. It is stated in *De Omnibus* that consciousness "comes into existence" through the distinction between reality and ideality (DO 168). Reflection also becomes part of the human constitution at that point, as I have mentioned, and although reflection contributes to consciousness, a distinction must be made between the two because reflection is described as a passive recognition of a "possibility of the relation" while consciousness is said to be "*the relation*" (DO 169). Such a picture does not contradict what is said in other works—and if it is compared to Anti-Climacus's claim in *Sickness* that the self, as a spirit, is "the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation," it becomes evident that the self-spirit represents the metacognition of consciousness that is directed at itself, that is to say, self-consciousness. In contrast to the passive thought of reflection, the self-spirit actively relates the relation and forms a synthesis between reality and ideality. In context of the first self and the deeper self, self-consciousness can be viewed as the rupture within selfhood when the deeper self-element develops and creates a second layer of consciousness, distant from the first self-element, so that there is an I-self that can be critical of itself as a me-self, as was mentioned earlier.[342] To put it differently, the self is both a subject that recognises and an object that is recognised. Accordingly, Jamie Aroosi observes in a recent work that the self-relating relation signifies self-consciousness: "The language of relation is clearly a reference to self-consciousness, insofar as self-consciousness entails a relationship between ourselves as a subject and as an object, between our 'I' and our 'me.'"[343]

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340 See §2.1.1.

341 George J. Stack, *Kierkegaard's Existential Ethics* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1977), 56.

342 See §2.3.2.

343 Jamie Aroosi, *The Dialectical Self: Kierkegaard, Marx, and the Making of the Modern Subject* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 17.

In *Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis states that "the most concrete content that consciousness can have is consciousness of itself" and he distinguishes such concrete self-consciousness from any abstract notion of "pure self-consciousness" (CA 143). Patrick Stokes makes an important observation in pointing out that Haufniensis's use of the term "consciousness" in his work is analogous to Climacus's use of the term subjectivity in *Postscript*: both terms refer essentially to a "self-reflexive and ultimately private (or, at least, capable of supporting the privacy of inwardness) perspective upon the objective world."[344] The term "self-reflexive" is simply a technical term for a self-referential quality, that is to say, the quality of containing a reflection or image of itself. Accordingly, John Davenport describes the spirit as a "*reflexive structure* that transcends the first-order relation of hylomorphic or animal unity" that exists between one's physical and psychical elements.[345] If Stokes is correct in making a strong connection between Kierkegaard's concepts of consciousness and subjectivity, which he probably is, then my account of subjectivity and inwardness in the first chapter applies to consciousness, at least to a large extent—and the advancement of consciousness is an advancement of subjectivity and inwardness.

In *Sickness*, Anti-Climacus puts self-consciousness and the self in the context of the individual will: "Generally speaking, consciousness—that is, self-consciousness—is decisive with regard to the self; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self." (SUD 29). In light of what has been established regarding the self-spirit, it is not surprising that increased self-consciousness leads to "more self," or as I have put it, a "thicker self." It is also in line with my position that expanded self-consciousness correlates with the development of the deeper self. However, I have not yet addressed the middle term in the quoted lines, namely the concept of will (*Villie*). Nowhere in his writings, neither the published nor the unpublished ones, does Kierkegaard discuss that concept in detail, but at least to a large extent it seems to correspond to the colloquial and lexical meaning the term had in 19th century Denmark, which is in agreement with its contemporary meaning, both in Danish and English, namely, as accounted for by Narve Strand, the "capacity or trait of being able to make choices, or to arrive at and stick to a decision, or purpose, which might manifest itself in behaviour."[346] As Strand adds, the term can also be used in a qualified sense for "capacity

344 Patrick Stokes, "Consciousness," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome II: Classicism to Enthusiasm* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2016), 56.

345 Davenport, "Selfhood and 'Spirit,'" 235.

346 Narve Strand, "Will" in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome VI: Salvation to Writing* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2016), 235. See also *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1918–56), vol. 26, cols. 1579–1604.

or trait or state or activity of the soul."[347] It is used in both these ways by Kierkegaard, but rather than being attributed to the soul, it is a faculty of the individual *spirit* according to which decisions are made and actions initiated. Strand discusses the various applications of the term by the Dane, but the context that I am concerned with here is how the will of an individual relates to Kierkegaard's concept of consciousness, as well as to his concept of freedom, the latter of which is the topic of the next subsection. In the beginning of this chapter, I explained the spirit in terms of representing self-consciousness and freedom. However, it must be stressed that such self-consciousness and freedom are not floating around in some abstract reality. Rather, they are grounded in an individual human being, aspects of an individual spirit. Strand identifies the will to be that ground, as he understands Anti-Climacus to be "acknowledging" that "consciousness is at bottom the work of the will."[348] This view is also expressed by Aroosi, in a passage that I will use as a platform to explain my point of view:

> [Kierkegaard] clarifies that "the self is *not* the relation but is the relations' relating itself to itself. And in redefining the self as the relation's "relating," Kierkegaard is trying to draw our attention to the volitional nature of self-consciousness. That is, in relating ourselves to ourselves, our "I" to our "me," Kierkegaard does not see the self in any of the self-definitions we might apply to ourselves (our self does not reside in the relation); instead, he sees it in the agency driving the very activity of self-consciousness (the relation's *relating*). In other words, there is will behind self-consciousness, and it is in this will that selfhood resides.[349]

Aroosi is correct in maintaining that Kierkegaard is emphasising the volitional feature of self-consciousness. This is a point that is also made by John Glenn, who argues that "while self-consciousness is certainly essential to selfhood as self-relation," what is ultimately stressed by Kierkegaard is "the volitional rather than the cognitive element of the self-relation." As Glenn observes, saying "that the self is self-relating is to attribute to it the capacity for such reflexive activities as self-love, self-hate, self-judgment, self-direction—and, above all, of faith or despair, of willing to be or not to be itself."[350] Strand also supports his claim that "consciousness is at bottom the work of the will" by referring to the appendix of *Sickness* where Socratic intellectualism is criticised and where the human will is put in the foreground rather than the cognitive process of acquiring knowledge. Anti-Climacus, for instance, states

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347 Ibid.

348 Ibid., 237.

349 Aroosi, *The Dialectical Self*, 17.

350 John D. Glenn, Jr., "The Definition of the Self and the Structure of Kierkegaard's Work," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Vol. 19: The Sickness undo Death*, ed. Robert L Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 11.

that "willing is dialectical and has under it the entire lower nature of man" (SUD 94). However, none of this substantiates the position that consciousness is regarded by Kierkegaard as "the work of the will," or, as Aroosi puts it, that "there is will behind self-consciousness" and that the self "resides" in that will. It is true that instinctive will is prior to consciousness, so that when one acquires proper human consciousness, including self-consciousness, one discovers some already existing primal will, for example the will to drink when one is thirsty. However, such will is part of immediacy, belonging to the instincts and the desires for which the first self serves as a conscious front.[351] The feature of will that Kierkegaard is primarily concerned with, however, is agency that qualifies as freedom. In philosophy, the standard definition of an "agent" is someone who acts, but within agency a distinction is made between actions that are outside of one's control and actions that are within one's control, that is to say actions that are not conditioned by one's natural instincts and environment.[352] The latter type of agency, free or self-determining agency, is what Kierkegaard means by his concept of freedom. The will, as the faculty that makes decisions and initiates actions, is the *locus* of agency and thus the locus of freedom. Contrary to Strand and Aroosi, it is my suggestion that the free aspect of the will results from self-consciousness, not the other way around. Basically, such consciousness generates awareness of possibilities, which is a precondition for the exertion of freedom. One becomes self-aware before one exercises one's will in any meaningful sense, so the former must be primary to the latter. The existential topology I have in mind is in line with Schrag's perspective that "the self is not a 'something' which *has* intellect, will, and emotion; the self is a becoming consciousness of which intellect, will, and emotion are emergent modalities."[353] The will does not begin as a modality of self-consciousness, but it becomes increasingly so with freer agency, resulting from the development of self-consciousness. Moreover, when freedom advances in individuals, they are capable of taking responsibility for their whole constitution, including the aspects they do not have control over. So, the bottom line is that instead of there being "will behind self-consciousness," as Aroosi argues, there is self-consciousness behind the most significant feature of the will, the capacity for freedom. Self-consciousness constitutes its own ground as a cognitive process in a human being—and one's freedom depends on it.

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351 See §2.2.2.

352 The question of whether people have free will can be regarded as misleading in the sense that it presumes a positive or a negative answer, while the most likely condition is that people have free will *up to a degree*. Kierkegaard does not claim that people's free will can be absolute, but rather than the degree to which people have free will can be advanced.

353 Schrag, *Existence and Freedom*, 52.

It may have influenced the position of Aroosi and Strand that later in the same paragraph where Anti-Climacus says that more self-consciousness means more will, he reverses the order of the terms: "A person who has no will at all is not a self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he has also" (SUD 29). However, this statement is also compatible with my reading, because if the will is a modality of self-consciousness, as I claim, the expansion of one's will is also an expansion of one's self-consciousness. Moreover, in line with what I have already established regarding the will, I agree with Elrod that the term in this context is a reference to freedom.[354] The statement draws attention to how crucial freedom is to selfhood: of the modalities of self-consciousness, such volition is singled out as absolutely essential to the thick self. Without the ability to take control of one's actions, one cannot make the movements of infinitude and finitude—and one cannot become a concrete self, as Mark Taylor makes clear: "As a self-conscious human being, the subject is no longer simply an extension of natural force and social custom. But since the person still has not become a self-determining agent, he is not yet a concrete individual."[355] The spirit of a human being is a self-shaping force that breaks away from immediacy. Although self-consciousness is a necessary feature of such a force, it is insufficient without developing a modality of a self-determining agency.

There is another claim made in the quoted passage by Aroosi that is necessary to address. He maintains that "Kierkegaard does not see the self in any of the self-definitions we might apply to ourselves," but rather in the will as "the agency driving the very activity of self-consciousness." In other words, the self is identified as the agency that relates to the relation and actively structures or shapes the human being, but not to any manifestations of that activity, the shape of the character that a human being acquires. So, in relation to a distinction between a self-structuring agency, on the one hand, and manifested self-substance, on the other hand, only the former constitutes the self, according to Aroosi. He identifies that agency as the will, but I have identified that agency as self-consciousness and freedom, the latter being a modality of such consciousness. Recall that Anti-Climacus identifies the self as the spirit in the *Sickness* passage—and the spirit is the self-structuring agency. Thus, the question becomes whether the self should be regarded only as spirit or whether it should be understood in a thicker sense, so that it is extended to the character that the spirit produces, what Aroosi refers to as "self-definitions." The solution of both Elrod and Davenport is to categorise the spirit as the "structuring principle of the self," while the totality of the self-

354 Elrod, *Being and Existence*, 81.

355 Mark C. Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel & Kierkegaard* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2000), 237.

concept includes the character.[356] I will follow Elrod and Davenport in this regard, because such an interpretation of Kierkegaard's concept of the self is better able to capture the breadth of the concept across different works and pseudonyms, for example the different focus in *Either/Or* and *Two Ages*. Moreover, one can make better sense of *Sickness* if the thicker concept is presumed, such as regarding the despair of wanting or not wanting to be oneself. However, I disagree with Davenport on what constitutes the substance of the self's manifestation. He adheres to a narrativist theory of identity like Anthony Rudd, while I reject narrativism, as will be discussed in relation to repetition in chapter four. My alternative is based on actions rather than narratives, as will become evident in subsection 2.3.7 below on achieving the self by decisions and resolve.

I have now adequately established the meaning of the self-consciousness that is advanced by the disparity between reality and ideality, as well as demonstrating its connection to the will and to freedom. In Kierkegaard's existential topology the terms "reality" and "ideality" are practically synonymous with the concepts of finitude and infinitude, which I explained in the previous subsection. The finite reality represents immediacy, or as Elrod puts it, "the raw character of what is experienced" before it is "brought into relationship with ideality."[357] Recall that ideality is associated with language by Kierkegaard: it is the linguistic mode of living that breaks away with raw immediacy and creates the disparity. One's self-consciousness is the active force that relates finite reality with infinite ideality in order to make one's ideal concrete in one's actual existence. What exists in one's imagination is repeated in one's actions, although, out of necessity, an imagined excellence that is made concrete is destined to become imperfect in actuality. However, it can be advanced through repetition of the same concretising movement, so that the ideal is gradually made more excellent in one's life. Thus, there is a process of twofold repetition—and my contention is that Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming consists fundamentally in such a process.

In *De Omnibus*, self-consciousness is described as interested in contrast to reflection which is described as disinterested (DO 170). The interestedness in question can be described as an engaging subjective concern. This corresponds to my earlier description of reflection as passive and self-consciousness as active. The degree to which self-consciousness can be characterised as interested or active depends on how developed its intellectual, emotional, and volitional modalities are—particularly the quality of its self-determining agency. Just as

356 Elrod, *Being and Existence*, 31; Davenport, "Selfhood and 'Spirit,'" 236.

357 Elrod, *Being and Existence*, 45.

one's will is advanced as a modality of self-consciousness, so does one's reflective reason advance as an intellectual modality and one's passion as an emotional modality. Indeed, Kierkegaard frequently points out the significance of all these factors, for example when he stresses, via Climacus, in *Postscript* that "in existence, the important thing is that all elements are present simultaneously" and that "thinking is not at all superior to imagination and feeling, but is coordinate" (CUP-I 346–347). The elements complement each other—and how they co-function determines the competence and disposition of one's spirit as a structuring principle of the self. The description of self-consciousness as interestedness in *De Omnibus* is carefully chosen. The etymological roots of the term "interest" is invoked to make a point: it is derived from the Latin term *interesse*, which means "to be in between." Interestedness thus captures how consciousness is located between finite reality and infinite ideality in the existential topography—and self-consciousness relates itself to that relation. At the same time, the interestedness of self-consciousness signifies thoughtful and passionate will, that is to say, the development of the above-mentioned modalities. A low level of interested self-consciousness, however, is called spiritlessness by Kierkegaard—and it can result in the evasion of the task of selfhood.

So, the interestedness of self-consciousness drives the process of self-becoming.[358] The sum of the self-related ideals that one strives to make concrete in one's actuality can be regarded as constituting Kierkegaard's notion of the ideal self, which is mentioned by Judge William in the second part of *Either/Or*:

> When the individual has known himself and has chosen himself, he is in the process of actualizing himself, but since he is supposed to do that freely, he must know what it is he wants to actualize. What he wants to actualize is certainly himself, but it is his ideal self, which he cannot acquire anywhere but within himself. If he does not hold firmly to the truth that the individual has the ideal self within himself, all of his aspiring and striving becomes abstract. (EO-II 259)

In context of the first self and the deeper self, it is arguably in the latter where the urge for ideality grows, even though the original disparity between reality and ideality is brought about by language, at the level of the first self, before the deeper self is properly developed. Such a perspective is in line with the role of the superego in the Freudian model—and it receives support from a plausible reading of *Either/Or*, according to which the work is viewed as a dialogue between the first self, represented by A, and the deeper self, represented

[358] The interestedness can be viewed as an aspect of one's pathos, as will become clear in chapter three. See §3.2.

by Judge William. However, as an exemplar of Kantian morality, Judge William should probably be regarded as signifying the early stages of the deeper self rather than its fully developed pattern, which would be reflected in a more authentically religious outlook, according to which social norms are relativised.[359] However, even if the deeper self is highly developed, its authority over the self-constitution is far from inevitable. Rather, the first self can reassert its authority and for example contribute features of aesthetic immediacy to the ideal for which the self in its totality strives. Such open-endedness is in line with the dialectical structure of Kierkegaard's authorship. In this regard, it should be pointed out that his Christian writings, for example *Works of Love*, include passages that put impossible demands on people—producing guilt that is arguably needless if not harmful—in a way that is reminiscent of aspects of the Freudian superego that is commonly associated with unwholesome repressive mentality. As may apply to the deeper self, the superego is not simply an emphatic "voice" of sensible moral restraint or benign religious resolve, but an ambivalent element, which, as it is neatly summarised by Jonathan Lear, "is formed in response to the childhood fears of their own aggression and thus, in the first instance, is an infantile solution to an infant's problem."[360]

2.3.5 Freedom between necessity and possibility

Kierkegaard's concept of freedom (*Frihed*) has already been introduced in connection to my account of self-consciousness—and further light will now be cast on the role of freedom in his existential topography. It has been established that freedom is the self-determining aspect of the human will—and as such a modality of self-consciousness. It has also been established that such self-determining agency is essential to the structuring principle of the self, namely the spirit. Anti-Climacus states in *Sickness* that "the self is freedom" (SUD 29). As has been mentioned earlier, he also states that the "spirit is the self" (SUD 13). Recall that the latter statement has been interpreted as identification of the spirit as the active structuring force of the self, a force that has in its most basic sense been described as consisting of self-consciousness and freedom, where the latter relies on the former. Freedom relies on self-consciousness because the realm of the possible emerges through such consciousness—it implies choice—but in addition an attention must be drawn to the even more essential conceptual connection: the self-determining agency that the freedom concept refers to must necessarily contain self-consciousness, some sort of basic self-awareness. Otherwise it

[359] See §3.3.1.

[360] Lear, *Freud*, 221.

cannot conceptually qualify as such an agency. It would not really be freedom residing in an individual but some mystical abstract phenomenon. So, the claim that the self is freedom, is practically synonymous to the claim that the self is spirit. The term "freedom" can be regarded as a convenient signifier for self-conscious and self-determining agency. This position is line with Ferreira's resolute standpoint, based on her insightful interpretation of *Concept of Anxiety*, which supports my overall case:

> To put it simply, spirit is freedom. To say that "spirit" establishes (CA 71) or constitutes and sustains (CA 81) the synthesis of body and soul is to say that we are posited "as spirit" (CA 98) when we actualize our freedom in any way (CA 91). Before that there is innocence, or spirit "dreaming" (CA 41); where the "synthesis" is "not actual" yet (CA 49), spirit is not yet posited "as spirit" (CA 98). Freedom is something that has to be achieved, since in "innocence freedom was not posited as freedom (CA 123).[361]

Thus, the structural side of self-becoming can be described as the ascendency of freedom in a human being. The task of such self-becoming is to achieve freedom, but it is a perpetual process towards perfection that one cannot expect to reach. Freedom is not an external ideal to make concrete in the same sense as the ideals discussed in the last subsection, but rather an internal capacity to *actualise* to greater degree—a capacity inherent in people's linguistic second nature. The advancement of freedom is an advancement of open-endedness, in contrast to the natural determination of immediacy, so it is essentially non-teleological, except in the sense of the subjective inward process itself, which has the end-goal of actualising freedom. If one insists on *telos*, it would therefore consist in the abandonment of any *telos*, which corresponds neatly to the position of Kangas, which I accounted for in chapter one.[362] However, three provisions must be made in this respect. First, one must distinguish between Kierkegaard's philosophy—where choice is without prescript, in line with the dialectical ambivalence of the authorship—and his own personal conviction, which in time was increasingly shaped by his Christian faith, even though aesthetic qualities are redeemed in his conception of the religious sphere. Secondly, the ascendency of freedom in people means that they ground their existence on freedom—so that the shape their life takes is genuinely grounded in self-determining decisions and resolve—and such ground in freedom has an interesting resonance with his religious-philosophical outlook, in a way that is often overlooked, as will be addressed in chapter three. Thirdly, although Kierkegaard should not be read as offering a philosophical prescript regarding the content to which freedom should be

361 M. Jamie Ferreira, *Kierkegaard* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 83.

362 See §1.3.

applied, he makes philosophical suggestions regarding the form of freedom, offering insights into his conception of freedom: one's task "in the realm of the spirit," namely in the realm of freedom, is to "transform repetition into something inward, into freedom's own task, into its highest interest, so that while everything else changes, it can actually realize repetition" (CA 18n).[363] This is a further exposition of the formal or structural side of self-becoming; the task of such self-becoming is not only the ascendency of freedom, but also to make repetition inward or subjective—and to turn such repetition into freedom's "highest interest."[364]

Subjective repetition as the highest interest of freedom corresponds well with what was said about repetition in relation to self-consciousness between reality and ideality in the last subsection: in the process of self-becoming one's self-determining agency is concerned with repetition of the movements of infinitude and finitude in order to make ideals concrete in one's actual existence. Possibilities are conceived through the imaginative expansion of the movement of infinitude, while necessities are conceived through the imaginative contraction of the movement of finitude. Freedom emerges and grows as a modality of self-consciousness through the opposition of possibility and necessity, created by language—and it subsequently becomes an essential feature of the force that actively structures and sustains the synthesis between possibility and necessity. In other words, the self-determining agency that develops through the polarity, subsequently constitutes and shapes the syntheses of the poles, which is logically a sound position, although it may initially appear to be a fallacy. Moreover, there is a constant interaction between self-determining agency as a result of the polarity, on the one hand, and self-determining agency as the creator of the synthesis, on the other hand. By associating the self-determining agency with repetition, Kierkegaard can, via Haufniensis, be viewed as emphasising the significance of patience for proper application of freedom. Kierkegaard frequently uses the term "patience" (*Taalmod*; *Taalmodighed*) in his upbuilding discourses, such as in "To Gain One's Soul in Patience," "To Preserve One's Soul in Patience," and "Patience in Expectancy," all of which were published as part of *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*.[365] As I have previously addressed, the soul in Kierkegaard's terminology is synonymous to the psyche or the mind, which along with the body is part of the psychosomatic entity that human beings inherit from immediacy, in

[363] As was suggested in chapter one, the pseudonymous author of *Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis, can be regarded as representing Kierkegaard's views without much reservation, yet contradictions between claims in *Concept of Anxiety* and other works by Kierkegaard would cause concerns. However, the statements on repetition by Haufniensis correspond well with the statements made by Constantius in *Repetition*, so they can be assumed to represent Kierkegaard's actual position. The context will be made clearer in the fourth chapter on repetition.

[364] I'll discuss this statement in chapter four.

[365] EUD 159–75; 185–205; and 206–24. References are also made to patience in UDVS 118–19; EO-II 134–38; and WL 219–22, the last of which will be brought up in §3.3.4 on the abyssal ground of freedom.

contrast to the spirit, namely the structuring force involving the self-determining agency.[366] Recall that the immediacy-element is preserved in the thick concept of the self, so in achieving the self, the spirit elevates the psyche in a way that can be compared to the religiously charged practice of gaining and preserving one's soul in patience. Repetition as freedom's highest interest can be described in terms of the ability to endure, of persevering with confident serenity instead of giving up in despair—and that kind of endurance captures, to a large extent, the meaning of patience. Pattison also links repetition to patience, as well as associating repetition with "contemporaneity," a term that will be discussed in the next subsection on the instant between time and eternity—and he describes the work of repetition, patience, and contemporaneity as follows:

> And what is this work? It is to secure the possibility of a transtemporal coherence in the self that goes beyond the "identity" given by innate attributes or social roles. As inseparable from the leap into freedom, it qualifies this leap by showing that it cannot be a one-off leap but, instead, can exist only as a sustained and constant process of self-choosing—something that, despite its character of "leap" and "moment" is as settled as the almost monotonous wind that has learned to be at home in the mountains.[367]

Transtemporal coherence is a coherence that is persistent across time. Repetition as freedom's highest interest contributes to such coherence, beyond the level of "innate attributes or social roles," which is the level of immediacy, although at least the latter is immediacy that can be altered through freedom. Recall that the transformation from the state of immediacy to a linguistic mode of living was described as a qualitative leap earlier in this chapter, because language creates the condition for proper self-consciousness and freedom.[368] One leaps into freedom, but the leap is only the very beginning of the process of self-becoming, and the development of one's self-determining agency requires the patience of "sustained and constant process of self-choosing," which is another way of phrasing the repetition of the movements of infinitude and finitude. To compare the well-rounded self-activity to the resolve of the "monotonous wind that has learned to be at home in the mountains," is charged with meaning that will be indicated in the final section of this chapter and spelled out in chapter four on repetition.

Earlier in the same paragraph of *Concept of Anxiety* where repetition is linked to freedom's highest interest, there are lines that are relevant to what I have referred to as the distinction

366 See §2.3.2.
367 Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 76.
368 See §2.1.1.

between the self-structure and the self-substance: "In the realm of the spirit, the task is not to wrest a change from repetition or to find oneself moderately comfortable during the repetition, as if spirit stood only in an external relation to the repetition of spirit" (CA 18n). This can seem to counter my standpoint, as I have argued that change results from repetition, whereas one is shaped through repetition, both by repeating the content of thought in action and by repeating the movements of infinitude and finitude.[369] However, a close look reveals that my position is not countered, although an important point is being made by Kierkegaard, via Haufniensis, which must be recognised. The sentence begins by the qualification "in the realm of the spirit," which means that Haufniensis is referring to the realm of freedom, which is the structural side of the self, having to do with form and function of internal processes, and only the content that is closely related to such processes, such as the quality of the self-determining agency. When he says that "the task is not to wrest a change from repetition," he is saying that one should engage in a subjective cultivation of one's freedom independently of an objective aim, so that the internal cultivation is persued regardless of external concerns. The position can be interpreted as an application of Lutheranism to the philosophy of the self, that is to say, the Lutheran doctrine of *sola fide*, according to which one is justified by private faith alone, while excluding good deeds. In other words, Haufniensis is radically distinguishing between the internal and the external, in an analogous manner to how I have distinguished between the self-structure and the self-substance. The Lutheran analogy of course suggests that the internal is superior to the external—and it is indeed the most plausible interpretation, both of the quoted lines and of Kierkegaard's body of work. Applied to his general philosophy of the self, this suggests that the core of people's self-identity is based on their private self-constitution, namely their internal self-determining agency, hidden from the external world. However, the Lutheran analogy also suggests that deeds still matter, because one must take responsibility for one's actions and one's whole behaviour becomes part of who one is. I contend that this applies to Kierkegaard's philosophy as well, so that one's outward character and actions become part of one's selfhood through responsibility—and my reference to self-substance is essentially a reference to the content of such responsibility. I put the word "outward" in front of character in order to stress that I am referring to the external character as it manifests itself in the world through behaviour and expression. In this regard, three Danish scholars—Sverre Raffnsøe, Matias Dalsgaard, and Marius Gudman-Høyer are correct in their account of Kierkegaard's concept of the self by explaining it not only in terms of a "relation that relates itself to itself,"

[369] The twofold repetition that was mentioned in §2.3.4. See also earlier discussion on repetition in §1.3.

but also a relation that relates itself to "the world." In this way, the self should be considered to consist of both the internal structuring force of the spirit through the reflexive self-relation, and an outward character through the world-relation. Moreover, they are correct in stressing responsibility in relation to his concept of freedom: "In Kierkegaard's account, authentic human life transgresses any system or organization. This is because freedom is at the core of the human being. Becoming truly human is a matter of becoming responsible for one's life—in freedom."[370] In *Either/Or*, Judge William states that individuals choose themselves "as a complex specific concretion" where the choice is made according to their "freedom" (EO-II 251). Such a choice signifies the responsibility for one's character in all of its manifestations. However, the key passage is the following expression by Anti-Climacus in *Sickness*, where he describes the self-becoming process of a "man of immediacy," who is merely "psychically qualified" (SUD 51). Such a man can be described as representing the first self-element, as a conscious front of immediacy, before the deeper self-element has properly developed—and before he can be regarded as spiritually qualified:

> [T]o a certain degree he has separated his self from externalities, because he has a dim idea that there may even be something eternal in the self. . . . He has no consciousness of a self that is won by infinite abstraction from every externality, this naked abstract self, which, compared with immediacy's fully dressed self, is the first form of the infinite self and the advancing impetus in the whole process by which a self infinitely becomes responsible for its actual self with all its difficulties and advantages. (SUD 55)

So, a sense of eternity is dawning on him, which coincides with the emergence of a sense of infinity and possibility. The "naked self," namely the self that is "won by infinite abstraction from every externality," is the ideal self. Freedom grows in him by the emerging polarity of possibility and necessity—and its agency is applied to make the self-ideal concrete by synthesising it with the "fully dressed self," which is the manifested self-substance before it is shaped by the concretising process. Anti-Climacus calls it immediacy's self, but this should not be understood literally, as pure immediacy has no self, as is made evident earlier in the same segment of the work (SUD 53). However, it is closely connected to immediacy—and can be regarded as its conscious front, as I explained in relation to the Freudian ego.[371] The concrete self that emerges through the synthesis is the "actual self," a new manifestation of the self, shaped through freedom as the self-determining agency—and for which the self-

[370] Sverre Raffnsøe, Matias Møl Dalsgaard, and Marius Gudman-Høyer, "Chapter 8: Søren Kierkegaard," in *The Oxford Handbook of Process Philosophy & Organization Studies*, ed. Jenny Helin, Tor Hernes, Daniel Hjorth, and Robin Holt (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 120.

[371] See §2.2.2.

determining agency takes "responsibility." Notice, that for the internal agency to take responsibility for the external manifestations of character, implies a radical distinction between the two—and it must be the agency which takes responsibility that constitutes the core self. It is to such a core self that Kierkegaard is referring in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* when he addresses the significance of how one is constituted as an observer: What one experiences does not merely depend "upon what one sees, but what one sees depends upon how one sees; all observation is not just a receiving, a discovering, but also a bringing forth, and insofar as it is that, how the observer himself is constituted is indeed decisive" (EUD 59). How one perceives things rests on the quality of the internal agency, which also takes decisions and exercises resolve. Thus, one's freedom, as one's self-determining agency can be described as one's inward character in contrast to one's outward character—and one's inward character is subjective and can be regarded as synonymous to inwardness.[372] This agency shapes itself and internalises value, but the content of the shape and values in question can only be known to others through the agency's outward character and actions.[373] The cultivation of the agency as a structuring force, on the one hand, and the substance of the outward character for which it takes responsibility, on the other hand, should be regarded as the subjective and objective aspects of what I have designated as the thick self, namely the self that one achieves in Kierkegaard's scheme of things.

Anti-Climacus refers to freedom as "the dialectical aspect of the categories of possibility and necessity" (SUD 29). The term "dialectical" in this context is best understood as simply the result of a successful interaction between two oppositional poles—in this instance between the poles of possibility and necessity. In the same way, concreteness is the dialectical aspect of the categories of finitude and infinitude, self-consciousness the dialectical aspect of the categories of reality and ideality, and temporality the dialectical aspect of the categories of eternity and time, as will soon be addressed. Anti-Climacus makes clear that "possibility and necessity are equally essential to becoming," as well as reaffirming in brackets that "the self has the task of becoming itself in freedom" (SUD 35). Moreover, he claims actuality to be the "unity of possibility of necessity" (SUD 36), a point that had five years earlier been made

372 See §1.1.2.

373 As an example, nothing can be known about the true nature of Aristotle's agency. The only substance that can be established regarding his character is how it manifested itself in the world through his actions, which in turn depends on documented testimonies and events.

by his fellow pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, in *Fragments* (PF 74).[374] The meaning is that possibilities that freedom actualises in the world are unavoidably shaped by necessity, so that the new reality—what has become actual—is a combination of possibility and necessity.

The concept of necessity (*Nødvendighed*) in this context serves to some extent the same function as finitude, as Anti-Climacus points out: "Just as finitude is the limiting aspect in relation to infinitude, so also necessity is the constraint in relation to possibility" (SUD 35). Necessity is the realm of natural limitation, the totality of the facts with which one must reckon—that which does not enable choice. However, he also states that "insofar as [the self] is itself, it is necessary, and insofar as it has the task of becoming itself, it is possibility" (SUD 35). It is not obvious how to interpret this sentence, but necessity seems to be conflated with one's actual situation at any particular time, which can be potentially changed by freedom's actualisation of possibilities. If so, it is comparable to conflating finitude with concreteness. Such a position could be criticised for confusing the dialectics of the topography. The conflation is reflected in Ferreira's commentary: "necessity is part of our concreteness. . . . [referring] to our concrete embeddedness in a context, most of which we cannot change," such as "the particularities of our physical and intellectual constitution."[375] Anti-Climacus stresses the importance of having a down-to-earth quality in order not to lose touch with reality, which means that one must "submit to the necessity in one's life, to what may be called one's limitation" (SUD 36). Otherwise the synthesis between necessity and possibility is poorly structured and instead of the concreteness of the actual, one's self can wither away in the fantasy of imagined possibilities. Necessity can also mean a lack of possibility in the sense of being the disposition of determinism, as is vividly explained:

> The determinist, the fatalist, is in despair and as one in despair has lost his self, because for him everything has become necessity. He is like that king who starved to death because all his food was changed to gold. Personhood is a synthesis of possibility and necessity. Its continued existence is like breathing (*re*spiration), which is an inhaling and

[374] Anti-Climacus says in this regard that "the philosophers are mistaken when they explain necessity as a unity of possibility and actuality" (SUD 36). In an endnote, Howard and Edna Hong explain this is a criticism of Hegel and cite his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (because its first part has been published as *The Science of Logic*, it is sometimes referred to as *Lesser Logic* to distinguish it from Hegel's work by the same name): "Necessity has been defined, and rightly so, as the union of possibility and actuality." SUD 176 n35; see also G. W F Hegel, *The Science of Logic* [*Lesser Logic*], trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 208. The same remark is made by the Hongs in an endnote in PF 299 n12. However, Jon Stewart argues that this position is mistakenly attributed to Hegel: "Hong fails to quote what Hegel says immediately after this: 'But when it is expressed only in this way, this determination is superficial, and therefore unintelligible.' Hegel draws on this view but departs from it in significant ways." Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 146 n57.

[375] Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, 155.

> exhaling. The self of the determinist cannot breathe, for it is impossible to breathe necessity exclusively, because that would utterly suffocate a person's self. (SUD 40)

This passage indicates the great extent to which the thick self relies on possibility, as well as signalling how vitally important the concept of possibility (*Mulighed*) is in Kierkegaard's existential topography. Moreover, the category of possibility is essential to self-becoming, because "to become" signifies change—as I will address in the beginning of chapter three—and one's freedom cannot be a force for change in the absence of possibility; there would be nothing to actualise, nothing to make concrete.[376] This explains the latter half of the above-mentioned quote from *Sickness,* according to which the self is in the realm of the possible, "insofar as it has the task of becoming itself" (SUD 35). The realm of possibility is the realm of contingency and unlimited options, opened up by the imagination.

Without possibility, there is no remedy for that which one would like to improve in one's current situation, so its lack signifies the hopelessness of stagnation. This explains to a large extent why Anti-Climacus calls "possibility the only salvation" and claims "the battle of *faith*" to be the mad battle "for possibility" (SUD 38). As Elrod puts it, "possibility saves the self from the suffocating grip of necessity," which corresponds to the metaphor used in the passage about possibility being a precondition for the self's breathing.[377] Possibility is of course future-orientated—and the same applies to the hopelessness that results from its lack: in order not to despair, one needs some minimum optimism for the future, not necessarily for some specific part of the future, but rather the future in its totality. In contrast to normal hope or wish, the term "expectancy" is sometimes used by Kierkegaard to capture such meaning.[378] Niels Nymann Eriksen observes that "expectancy is distinct from the projections of ordinary life in that it is not concerned with temporal fulfilment, but with the fullness of time."[379] Accordingly, possibility is associated with the future in a decisive manner by Haufniensis: "The possible corresponds exactly to the future. For freedom, the possible is the future, and the future is for time the possible" (CA 91). Haufniensis continues by also linking anxiety to both the possible and the future, which is in line with my earlier account of anxiety in relation to the human capacity of freedom.[380] The anxiety discloses the ambivalence of even a category as valuable as possibility—and another downside is the

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376 See §3.1.

377 Elrod, *Being and Existence*, 56.

378 See e.g. the discourses "The Expectancy of Faith" (1843) and "Patience in Expectancy" (1844), which were published in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (EUD 7–30; 205–226).

379 Niels Nymann Eriksen, *Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 51.

380 See §2.1.2.

hazard of despair that Anti-Climacus warns against if one fails in the movement of taking "possibility back into necessity" (SUD 37). Possibility is aptly conceived as an aspect of infinitude—and the process in which the self-determining agency actualises possibilities can be regarded as a further elaboration on the process in which infinitude is made concrete. What has been said about the crucial role of the imagination in relation to infinitude and finitude therefore applies equally to possibility—and its application to possibility is most directly relevant to self-becoming.[381] The act of imaginatively contemplating possibilities is the cornerstone in the process of self-becoming. In fact, an important training in the activity of self-becoming involves confronting the realm of the possible, as is indicated by Haufniensis: "Whoever is educated in anxiety is educated by possibility, and only he who is educated by possibility is educated according to his infinitude. Therefore possibility is the weightiest of all categories" (CA 156).

So, possibility is a precondition for self-becoming by making change possible and opening up the future. In the process of self-becoming, one's freedom first engages with possibilities and chooses between them. Then, one's freedom makes the choice actual by reconciling it with necessity and forging it accordingly. Change is brought forth through such activity—and the self is gradually shaped through its repetition.

2.3.6 The instant between time and eternity

In contrast to the categories of finitude and infinitude, which are a *spatial* set of opposites, the categories of time and eternity are a *temporal* set of opposites—temporal in the sense of pertaining to time or lack thereof. In its most basic sense, time is an indefinite non-spatial sequence of events in enduring succession, while eternity can either refer to everlasting time or to timelessness. Kierkegaard's concept of time (*Tid*) corresponds to its basic sense and his concept of eternity (*Evighed*) refers to timelessness, signifying the atemporality outside of time, which can also be viewed as a tenseless present. "Eternity, from the classical point of view, is timelessly complete, *perfect*," as Stephen Crites puts it.[382] The completeness and perfection of eternity became integral to the Christian outlook, where it is associated with the concept of the divine.[383] This is simple enough. However, Kierkegaard's conceptual

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381 See Elrod, *Being and Existence*, 58. See also Johannes Sløk's *Die Anthropologie Kierkegaards* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 195), 26, 54, 57, 62. Elrod says: "Sløk implies that the categories of necessity and possibility are the most potent expressions for the being of the self, because they entail the being of the finite and the infinite which is, by reflection, raised to the level of being conscious of oneself as ideal and real, which is then posed as a possibility for freedom."

382 Stephen Crites, "'The Blissful Security of the Moment': Recollection, Repetition, and Eternal Recurrence," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Vol. 6: Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, ed. Robert L Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 226. Plato considered eternity to be timeless, while Aristotle viewed it as everlasting.

383 In this regard, Augustine's *Confessions* and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* were influential works.

framework regarding the temporal—which includes notions such as the instant (*Øieblik*), temporality (*Timelighed*), and contemporaneity (*Samtidighed*)—is among the most perplexing aspects of his philosophy. Still, transparency can be brought to it by a few important conceptual clarifications. In relation to my presentation of Kierkegaard's concept of repetition in chapter one, the temporal concepts of past, present, and future were brought up and the present-orientation of repetition was linked to the notion of instant in its positive sense.[384] Now, it is time to explain what Kierkegaard means by the instant, how it relates to time and eternity, as well as its relevance for his concept of the self. Intertwined with such discussion will be an explanation of the notions of temporality and contemporaneity, both of which vary in meaning, depending on the context.

The term "instant" is also translated as the "moment," but I follow Kangas in preferring the former. His reasoning pertains to capturing the connotations of "discontinuity" and "suddenness," while avoiding connoting "continuity and duration, a span of time."[385] As he explains, "an instant passes before one even knows it as there," but "a moment, though ephemeral, lasts."[386] The literal meaning of the Danish word *Øieblik* is the "glance" or the "blink" of "eyes," of which the singular version is more common in English, in "the blink of an eye."[387] It must be noted that Kierkegaard periodically uses the Latin-derived word "moment," but any distinction between it and *Øieblik* is usually lost in translation, including in the Princeton series where both words are rendered as "moment." Although the term "instant" is to be preferred, the Latin-derived alternative has etymological roots and implications which, as William McDonald observes, are "incorporated into Kierkegaard's ethical and religious application of *Øieblik*."[388] Haufniensis explains in *Concept of Anxiety* that the Latin term for instant, *momentum*, is rooted in the word *movere*, which means "to move" (CA 88) and can symbolically refer to the power to act in a proper manner. Furthermore, as McDonald points out, *momentous* refers to "a relationship or circumstance of great importance," as well as "a turning point in a development, which is of decisive importance."[389] Although the instant is sudden, it can be full of potential that is connected to

384 See § 1.3.1.

385 Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 200 n14.

386 Ibid.

387 The Danish term corresponds etymologically to *Augenblick* in German.

388 William McDonald, "Moment," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome IV: Individual to Novel* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 173.

389 Ibid.

how one is oriented towards the present and the future, which again is relevant to the full meaning of Kierkegaard's concept of repetition, as will be addressed in chapter four.

In *Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard, via Haufniensis, identifies the instant as "the ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other" and adds that "with this the concept of temporality is posited, whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time" (CA 89). So, the eternal is somehow able to intersect time. From a theological point of view such intersection tends to represent the divine spark in man, while from a philosophical perspective it can be viewed as the junction of people's first or biological nature and their second or linguistic nature, that is to say, people acquire a sense of the eternal through linguistic and imaginative means—and that psychical factor intersects the physical factor of time. This contact creates the "ambiguity" that Haufniensis calls the instant. Moreover, this ambiguity seems to be so important for the properly human way of relating to time that the "temporality" of human beings is determined by it. The meaning of such temporality is thicker than the temporal as that which relates to time, because it refers to human experience after the spirit emerges where self-consciousness and freedom become an essential part of the human constitution. The advancement of one's spirit signifies the advancement of one's subjectivity and inwardness—and thus it is not surprising that Haufniensis says at one point that "whenever inwardness is lacking, the spirit is finitised" and that "inwardness is therefore eternity or the constituent of the eternal in man" (CA 151).

In line with the thicker meaning of temporality, Martin Heidegger states in a footnote in *Being and Time* that "when Kierkegaard speaks of 'temporality,' he means human being's being-in-time."[390] Such a way to phrase it, correctly emphasises that although eternity can intersect time through the human constitution, human life is necessarily grounded in time. As Pattison is keen to point out, the "philosophical pretension of regarding human beings *sub specie aeternitatis*" is rejected by the Dane.[391] Kierkegaard rejects that finite temporal beings have access to such an eternal standpoint, which is often referred to as "the view from nowhere" in contemporary philosophy.[392] In *Postscript*, for instance, Climacus criticises speculative philosophy for viewing human history from the standpoint of eternity—and thus neglecting human limitation: "Precisely because abstract thinking is *sub specie aeterni*, it disregards the concrete, the temporal, the becoming of existence, and the difficult situation of the existing person because of his being composed of the eternal and the temporal situated

390 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), 323 n3.
391 Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 66. *Sub specie aeternitatis* means "in the view of eternity."
392 The phrase is often attributed to Thomas Nagel; see his *View from Nowhere* (Oxford: OUP, 1986).

in existence" (CUP-I 301). Notice how the notion of becoming is here associated with the physical side of the synthesis, in contrast to its strong link to the psychical factor of possibility, which the last subsection explicated. This confirms that each side of the synthesis is equally important for the process of self-becoming. Surely, there would be no becoming without one's imagination opening up the space of possibilities, but there would neither be any becoming without an existence in time, where finitude and necessity function as limiting factors. In the same way that self-becoming cannot take place in the fantasy of pure infinitude and pure possibilities, there is no self-becoming in the timelessness of the eternal. Moreover, in contrast to eternity, temporal existence is fundamentally dynamic in the sense that everything is subject to constant change. In this regard, Pattison observes that there is no "finished state" for human actuality, but that existence is rather "itself a *process* of actualisation; it is in constant transition, constant movement, and therefore, is essentially temporal."[393] This is perfectly in line with the open-ended perpetuality that I have attributed to Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming. Pattison also identifies the emotion of anxiety as an inherent feature of temporality—and "the anxious self," according to him," is a self caught up in a process of development, poised vertiginously in the moment of transition from innocent ignorance to free self-consciousness."[394] Of course, *all* emotions must be temporal, but there is a good reason to single out anxiety in this respect, because it plays such an important role in the process of self-becoming, and even triggering the process itself, as I explained earlier in this chapter. One experiences anxiety in confronting one's possibilities and in the uncertainties involved in actualising them in one's concrete existence. Thus, the temporal task of self-becoming offers no escape from anxiety, no permanent peace of mind, until one joins eternity in death, as will be addressed at the end of chapter four.

The instant has significance for how one experiences time, or one's "time-consciousness," as McDonald puts it.[395] In turn, one's time-consciousness determines the nature of one's temporality. In this regard, it is important to observe that the instant is used in both a positive and a negative sense by Kierkegaard, and the same applies to temporality. However, in its negative sense, the instant is not the spiritual synthesis of time and eternity, but rather resulting from a mentality shaped by psychosomatic immediacy and the physical set of factors. Such an instant can be designated a *frivolously aesthetic instant*, for a lack of a better term, but it must be kept in mind that it is representative of a frivolous aestheticism, where

393 Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 66.
394 Ibid.
395 McDonald, "Moment," 173.

the deeper self-element is underdeveloped, in contrast to an elevated or serious aestheticism, where the deeper self-element is sufficiently developed but where the first self-element still reasserts its authority. Such a frivolously aesthetic instant or moment is, for example, presented by Mr. "A" in the segment "Rotation of Crops" in part one of *Either/Or*. For him the instant signifies, as McDonald puts it, an "undifferentiated point in a boring temporal succession, or an occasion for cultivating a diverting mood," or perhaps a "momentary twinkle," reflecting merely "desire and forgetfulness in sensuous enjoyment."[396] Such time-consciousness consequently shapes one's temporality, so it becomes a sequence of frivolous instants, empty of meaningful content. It is significant that, according to the frivolous aesthete, "arbitrariness is the whole secret" of how to approach life (EO-I 299): the mentality of arbitrariness can justly be considered to be the polar opposite of the mentality of those who engage in the task of self-becoming, as the next subsection will make clear.[397]

McDonald construes such a negative instant as an "atom of time," as well as "the (vanishing) point between past and future."[398] He contrasts it to the positive synthetic instant, which he describes as an "atom of eternity," in line with what Haufniensis states (CA 88), as well as "the (expansive) point when eternity intersects time." It is important to make the distinction and such an interpretation can be relied upon, as long as it is kept in mind that Kierkegaard should not be viewed as making metaphysical claims via Haufniensis, but rather as using figurative speech in order to illustrate different subjective experience of time.[399] What follows with regard to the synthetic instant must also be understood in that context. Julia Watkin has basically the same view of the distinction as McDonald: "The moment is an atom of time, but it can also become an atom of eternity, in the sense in which the individual, situated in the temporal, but relating to the realm of the eternal, can use each temporal moment in striving to develop the initial potentiality of the eternal or spiritual self, through the ethical-religious choices she or he makes."[400] I have preferred not to use the terminology of the "eternal or spiritual self," but it corresponds to what I have referred to as the *thick self*, forged by the process of self-becoming. Furthermore, I have not limited the relevant decision-

396 Ibid. See EO-I 285–300. See also CA 82n–83n.

397 I will discuss the aestheticism of "Rotation of Crops" in a more positive light in chapter three.

398 Such interpretation is mainly based on a contextual understanding, particularly the contrast that Kierkegaard makes between the time-consciousness of the negative instant and the time-consciousness of the positive instant. McDonald cites JP III 2740 regarding the "atom of time" reference. However, the text in question, which belongs to a draft and which in the Princeton series is published as a supplement to *Concept of Anxiety* (CA 196), is not sufficient as evidence and has even a questionable meaning: " . . . for the moment is really time's atom, but not until eternity is posited, and this is why one may properly say that eternity is always in ἐν ἀτόμῳ [the moment] (*Pap*. V B 55:6) *n.d.*, 1844. However, the interpretation receives support from CA 88, where an "atom of time" is contrasted to an "atom of eternity."

399 Haufniensis at one point calls the instant a "figurative expression" (CA 87).

400 Julia Watkin, *The A to Z of Kierkegaard's Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 76.

making to the categories of the ethical and the religious, except in the broad sense of the ethical, as I explained in chapter one and as I will further explore in the next subsection on achieving the self through decisions and resolve. In any case, Watkin is correct in highlighting the significance of the time-consciousness of the synthetic instant—where the eternal is posited in time—for the development of selfhood. In this regard the following passage of *Postscript*, in which Climacus addresses *Either/Or*, should be considered:

> Johannes the Seducer ends with the thesis that *woman is only the moment*. This in its general sense is the essential aesthetic thesis, that the moment is all and to that extent, in turn, essentially nothing, just as the Sophistic thesis that everything is true is that nothing is true. On the whole, the conception of time is the decisive element in every standpoint up to the paradox, which paradoxically accentuates time. To the degree that time is accentuated, to the same degree there is movement from the aesthetic, the metaphysical, to the metaphysical, to the ethical, the religious, and the Christian-religious. (CUP-I 299)

As was made clear in chapter one, I do not attribute to Kierkegaard's *philosophy* the teleological outlook that Climacus expresses. Nevertheless, the passage casts light on the time-consciousness of the synthetic instant. It captures the deep irony in the distinction between the two sorts of instants. On the one hand, the "moment is all," representing the attitude which in contemporary discourse is sometimes referred to as the irresponsibility of merely living for the moment, while disregarding the past and the future.[401] This time-experience is frivolously aesthetic, resulting in reducing the instant to "essentially nothing." On the other hand, the instant becomes crucially valuable when "time is accentuated." Thus, to posit the eternal in time is a way to accentuate time and to subjectively affirm the value of temporality in contrast to a mentality according to which temporality becomes a meaningless diversion, well captured in the phrase *to kill time*.[402] Pattison articulates the point well by stating that "even in the encounter with the eternal the subject is not taken out of time but is given time in a new way."[403] This receives support from Climacus's designation of the instant as the "fullness of time" in his earlier *Fragments* (PF 18), a phrase that also appears in *Postscript* (CUP-I 590–91) and in Kierkegaard's journals.[404] As Climacus suggests in the passage, the incarnated saviour in Christianity is an ultimate symbol of eternity intersecting time and a vivid affirmation of temporality—which virtually amounts to a stance in which the *world* is affirmed or redeemed as opposed to a stance in which the world is viewed negatively.

401 Haufniensis notes that "in order to define the sensuous life, it is usually said that it is in the moment" (CA 86).

402 This corresponds to the point I made in chapter one in relation to Roberto Unger.

403 Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 88.

404 JP IV 4737. The phrase can be found in Gal. 4:4. See §2.3.5.

Moreover, Climacus links the time-consciousness that accentuates time with the dynamism of "movement," where the human self is changed in a meaningful way. Such transformative movement is the self-becoming process where the thin self becomes the thick self. As applies to other sets of opposites in Kierkegaard's topography of the self, there is a repetition involved in self-becoming with regard to time and eternity, consisting in repeatedly bolstering the time-consciousness that results from positing the eternal in time. It is in this sense that Constantius, the author of *Repetition*, declares "eternity" to be the "true repetition" (R 221). The synthetic instant that one repeats, depends on the emergence of the spirit in a human being, that is to say, the emergence of a self-determining agency—and the quality of such an instant, its potentiality, depends on the cultivation of the agency: the true capacity to act independently of the various incentives and stimuli that are dominant in immediacy.

The time-consciousness of the synthetic instant grounds a proper human temporality, as Haufniensis explains: "If time is correctly defined as an infinite succession, it most likely is also defined as the present, the past, and the future. This distinction, however, is incorrect if it is considered to be implicit in time itself, because the distinction appears only through the relation of time to eternity and through the reflection of eternity in time" (CA 85). What is needed for the temporal experience in question is a "foothold" in a "present" which serves as the "dividing point" (CA 85). The frivolously aesthetic instant fails to be such a present, because every such instant, as well as its sum, "is a process (a passing by)," that is to say a boundless sequence without a decisive point of division (CA 85). Haufniensis is referring to such a negative sense of instant when he states that "the moment signifies the present as that which has no past and no future" and adds that "precisely in this lies the imperfection of the sensuous life" (CA 87). The eternal, however, "signifies the present," but is yet a tenseless timelessness and thus "has no past and no future (CA 87).[405] Haufniensis calls this the "perfection of the eternal," but it is not a perfection of human life, as it is constituted in time. However, when the eternal present intersects with time it establishes the dividing point that generates a proper sense of the past and the future, as well as the present itself. The glinting suddenness of the synthetic instant symbolises the present in its absolute core—and the time-consciousness that is most effective for self-becoming is one that is attuned to the present, because all actions are conducted in the present, all movement and all change, while one's remembrance of the fixed past are only memories of thought and one's expectations for the indeterminate future are only projections of thought. There is potential for action in the

[405] Strictly speaking it is a contradiction to identify a tenseless timelessness as the present (which is one of three tenses). However, the idea must be that such a present is in fact tenseless, as the other tenses are absent.

present and what happens in the present affects both the past and the future. However, there are two fundamental possibilities within a time-consciousness that is attuned to the present: one that is orientated towards the past and one that is orientated towards the future. Kierkegaard associates the former with the concept of recollection (CA 80) and the latter with the concept of repetition, as will be explained in chapter four. It is the future that is prioritised in his philosophy, mainly for the reason that is articulated as follows:

> [T]he future in a certain sense signifies more than the present and the past, because in a certain sense the future is the whole of which the past is a part, and the future can in a certain sense signify the whole. This is because the eternal first signifies the future or because the future is the incognito in which the eternal, even though it is incommensurable with time, nevertheless preserves its association with time. (CA 89)

There are a couple of points which need to be made in relation to this passage. First, notice that eternity is claimed to be incommensurable with time, which supports the view that the intersection of time and eternity in the synthetic instant is figurative speech rather than a metaphysical view: the time-consciousness is a product of thought where the eternal is conceived and synthesised through one's imagination. Secondly, it is being observed that if the whole temporal realm is considered at once it loses its quality of being temporal, thus linking it to the eternal—and the future is the "incognito" of that eternity.[406] One is thus better exposed to the perfection of eternity by orientation towards the future rather than the past.

However, there is another more straightforward reason for why priority is given to the future. As is mentioned in chapter one, one lives forwards, according to Kierkegaard, but understands backwards (CUP-II 187).[407] One lives indeed forward, and such observation is embraced and intensified in very concept of self-becoming—all becoming must indeed be a movement towards the future. Still, a time-consciousness attuned to the future, which is fundamentally a time-consciousness of hope, is not what Kierkegaard has in mind, but rather a subjective experience of time where the focus is on the present, of seizing the instant for action, while facing forwards, towards the future. I contend that this is the time-consciousness that is linked to Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming—and it is also the time-consciousness of his notion of repetition, thus further uniting self-becoming to

406 It is noteworthy that the concept of eternity was associated with the past in e.g. the paganism of ancient Greece, while in Christianity and Kierkegaard's philosophy the link to the future is stronger. Haufniensis mentions in this regard the linguistic practice of associating eternal life with future life (CA 89). In line with such "tensed eternity," Crites metaphorically uses the terms "the eternal past," "the eternal present," and "the eternal future," in order to illuminate Kierkegaard's notion of repetition. Crites, "Recollection, Repetition, and Eternal Recurrence," 227.

407 JP I 1030 (*Pap.* IV A 164). See §1.2.2.

repetition, reinforcing the thesis that one becomes through repetition. By the temporality that results from the synthesis of eternity and time, one gains the present, as well as the past and the future—and as a result, one gains the possibility of a self, in the thick sense of the term.

Kierkegaard's concept of contemporaneity has a twofold denotation, both parts of which are relevant to the time-consciousness and the temporality of the synthetic instant. On the one hand, it is part of Kierkegaard's Christian vocabulary, referring to contemporaneity with Christ in the sense of being psychologically co-present with the saviour.[408] Anti-Climacus states, for instance, the following in *Practice in Christianity*: "The past is not actuality—for me. Only the contemporary is actuality for me. That with which you are living simultaneously is actuality—for you" (PC 64).[409] The meaning is simple: the historical is speculative and lacks the dimension of the lived experience. On the other hand, the concept acquires philosophical meaning through its use by Climacus in *Postscript*, where it refers to uniting "the elements of life in contemporaneity" (CUP-I 348), that is to say, to combine and integrate various human faculties—including reflection, imagination, volition, reason, feeling, and emotion—and to make them part of one's lived experience. Therefore, the notion of contemporaneity is used for the resolute task of becoming a "whole human being" where "all elements are present simultaneously" (CUP-I 346), which I mentioned in connection to the Freudian structure of the Kierkegaardian self.[410] Moreover, the temporal aspect is made inherent in being a whole human being, so one must be subjectively attuned to the present and passionately engage with the world in one's daily life and action. In this sense, the notion of contemporaneity reflects the temporality of the synthetic instant—of facing the future here and now, which is as close to eternity as our temporality allows.

2.3.7 Achieving the self by decisions and resolve

Now, I have thoroughly explained the *Sickness* passage, including all the sets of opposites that constitute the synthesis to which the spirit relates. The final sentence of the passage—"considered in this way, a human being is still not a self"—is best understood in light of the distinction I have made between the thin self and the thick self, so that becoming a self is the transitional process in which the thick self is achieved. Moreover, I have distinguished between two sides of the thick self: the self-structure and the subjective or inward character, on the one hand, and the self-substance and the objective or outward character, on the other

408 Stokes, *The Naked Self*, 53. See also Stephen C. Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 114. The term's Christian meaning is the main meaning.

409 The ground for Kierkegaard's Christian concept of contemporaneity is prepared in Climacus's *Fragments*.

410 See §2.2.2.

hand, the former referring to the constitution and quality of one's self-determining agency and the latter referring to the manifestation of one's character in the world.[411] Furthermore, I have maintained that the subjective agency makes the outward character part of the thick self through taking responsibility for it.[412] In line with Kierkegaard's own terminology, I will use also the term *inwardness* for the inward character, while simply using the term *character* for the external side.[413]

My focus has been on the structural side, which is foundational for Kierkegaard's conception of the self-becoming: the dynamism of the relational view of selfhood, which from another perspective and scheme can be viewed as the tension and struggle between the first self-element and the deeper self-element, which emerge from the state of immediacy through language-acquisition. The thick self consists in selfhood where the deeper element is sufficiently developed, regardless of which of the elements eventually asserts dominance in one's agency. Likewise, the thick self consists in the strengthening of one's self-consciousness and the advancement of one's self-determining agency, which in turn synthesises the physical and psychical aspects of human nature, as well as sustaining the psychosomatic tension. Such fusion consists in applying one's imagination to generate the movements of infinitude and finitude, which in relation to self-becoming amounts to making ideals concrete in one's existence, so that possibilities are actualised in one's life. The thick self is ultimately forged through the subjective repetition of these movements. This process corresponds to Kierkegaard's "magic of the theatre," which I accounted for in chapter one—and just as the significance of the theatre relates to everyday experience rather than metaphysical theorising, Kierkegaard's conception of the self is based on observations regarding subjective experience from the first-person perspective, rather than being a speculative doctrine. With remarkable insight, he depicts a subjective landscape, or an existential topography.

With regard to the substantial external side of the thick self, to which I will now turn, it should be observed that it unfolds from nothing: there is no self-substance in the beginning of selfhood—and certainly no natural entity that can be empirically identified as the self. This aspect of Kierkegaard's conception of the self is well articulated by Pattison, who states that "what is decisive" for him "is that spirit, the self, is not to be construed in terms of some pre-existent essence or nature but as the free and active process whereby the differentiated

411 As has been mentioned, the subjective character does not lack substantial content, but it can only reveal itself and be known to others through its external manifestations.

412 Such responsibility should not be regarded as a voluntary choice, because it's forced upon individuals by other members of the society in which they participate, both informally through everyday relations and formally through law.

413 See §1.1.2 for an introduction to Kierkegaard's concept of inwardness.

structures of the self are brought into a unity."[414] Moreover, Pattison continues by explication that is in line with my thesis: "This is not a unity that simply emerges out of some kind of organic process; it is a unity that exits only as the free synthesizing action of the self, as a constantly repeated event."[415] However, this feature has caused some scholars to adopt the theory that the Kierkegaardian self is essentially verbal or rhetorical, so that one's self is virtually one's narrative.[416] This narrativist account was introduced in chapter one and it will be rejected in chapter four. For the rest of this chapter, however, I will outline my own view on the self-substance—and the topic will be further illuminated in the next two chapters, each of which will deal with what is left to explain in relation to my topic.

The cultivation of one's self-determining agency increases the control one has in shaping one's inwardness: one's will and one's whole subjective constitution. The various traits of one's inwardness are to a large extent shaped by norms and values that one internalises, in addition to attributes that one inherits from one's natural immediacy and other factors. In turn, one's inwardness shapes one's character through decisions (*Afgjørelse*) and resolve (*Beslutning*), which are expressed in actions and behaviour of all sorts. In this regard, the following lines of *Two Ages* are worthy of careful consideration: "Character is something engraved (χαράσσω), but the sea has no character, nor does the sand, nor abstract common sense, either, for character is inwardness" (TA 77–78). Kierkegaard's description of character as "something engraved" strongly suggests that it signifies outward or external traits of a human being, that it is to say, characteristics that are engraved in the sense of being manifested and thus detectable.[417] Inwardness, however, cannot be described as engraved. So, the subsequent statement that "character is inwardness" should not be interpreted as meaning that character is synonymous to inwardness, but rather that character is an expression and manifestation of inwardness. What is said about "the sea," "the sand," and "abstract common sense," fits such a context: they lack inwardness and therefore they lack character. In the same passage character is associated with both morality and immorality, which should be

414 Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 62.

415 Ibid.

416 See e.g. David Kangas, "Kierkegaard" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 383.

417 See Wolter Hartog, "Personality," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome V: Objectivity to Sacrifice* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2016), 75. My interpretation is in line with Hartog's understanding of the passage. In their endnotes, the Hongs make the following comment: "'charasso,' to make pointed, sharper, thus to engrave. The word 'character' is from this Greek root: an engraved mark or sign" (TA 171 n31).

understood in the sense that people's virtuosity is judged by their character.[418] One has no access to the inwardness of another person, so their goodness or badness, their integrity or corruption, can only be assessed by the engraved content of their character.

The distinction between inwardness and character is inherent to what I have described as the magic of the theatre, for the characters on stage represent possibilities to the inwardness of theatregoers—and options can be imaginatively pondered and actualised by their inward agency. Such actualisation of a character or certain characteristics is an important choice, which is initially made by a decision, but made fully concrete and engraved by resolve. "All essential decision is rooted in subjectivity," according to Climacus in *Postscript* (CUP-I 33), which in this context is synonymous to stating that it is rooted in inwardness. A decision that is genuine both shapes the inwardness itself and determines one's character—and the causal relation between the inward and the outward is normally interactive, because one tends to internalise the character one has chosen.[419] To qualify as a true decision, the choice must result from one's self-determining agency rather than being determined by one's immediacy. Moreover, the subjective choice is linked to one's interestedness and passion, in contrast to the speculative mentality of a detached and passionless "observer," whom he refers to as an "objective subject," and whom he accuses of not recognising the significance of the choice in question (CUP-I 33). In order to be effective, the choice must be definitive, in contrast to lukewarm halfway measures (CUP-I 221).[420] The decision is called "essential" by Climacus because the kind of decision he has in mind is one that is fundamental in shaping one's inwardness and determining one's character. In fact, what is ultimately at stake in the choice, is the essence of one's character, determined by a commitment to a decision of what one regards as absolute or unconditional, as Hubert Dreyfus stresses.[421] Such an existential choice can be viewed as selection of the ideals that make up one's ideal self.

It is safe to assume Climacus to be speaking on Kierkegaard's half regarding decision, as it corresponds well to the picture drawn across pseudonyms—and the same applies to resolve, which is both a verb and a noun, and the noun is sometimes rendered as "resolution." As

418 The exact words regarding immorality are: "As energy immorality is also character." It is unclear what he has in mind, but he appears to be avoiding unnecessary controversy in relation to associating immorality with character, so he opts instead for the energy of immorality.

419 In this regard, recall the wisdom of *Mother Night*, mentioned in §1.1.2: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be."

420 Climacus states: "What does it mean to assert that a decision is to a certain degree? It means to deny decision. Decision is designed specifically to put an end to that perpetual prattle about 'to a certain degree'" (CUP-I 221).

421 Dreyfus, "Christianity Without Onto-Theology," 93. However, my overall account of the self and its becoming differs from the one presented by Dreyfus.

Narve Strand observes, the meaning of the term is twofold: it can either mean "to make up one's mind or arrive at a decision," where "it signals the end of a process of deliberation," or it can refer to "an ongoing commitment to think and act in a certain way."[422] Kierkegaard primarily uses the term in the latter sense, signifying steadfastness, firmness, and willpower. Climacus is well aware that resolve can result in one-sidedness of character, because an ongoing commitment is necessarily exclusive of what is not chosen, leading one quality to be advanced at the cost of others, the definition of a *trade-off*. Such one-sidedness should not be confused with the previously mentioned wholeness of contemporaneity, according to which no human faculty is neglected: the wholeness has to do with the quality of the inward structure while one-sidedness has to do with the content of one's engraved character, as it is determined by the inward will. Importantly, Climacus embraces one-sidedness—although not without grief—as a necessary feature of people's finitude:

> I am well aware that every human being is somewhat one-sided, and I do not consider it a defect, but on the other hand it is a defect when a fashionable taste would make a one-sidedness into the whole. *Non omnes omnia possumus* [We cannot all do everything] holds true everywhere in life, but the task should not be forgotten on that account, and one-sidedness should on the one hand not be regarded without sadness and on the other hand should result from a strong resolution that would prefer to be something thoroughly than to dabble in everything. (CUP-I 349)

The meaning is clear: one's character is formless if one "dabbles in everything," while one shapes one's character by definite decision "to be something thoroughly" and by showing "strong resolve" in upholding the commitment in the course of time. The choice can, for instance, consist in certain faith and a certain vocation—and the resolve would be to steadfastly and devotedly practise the faith and vocation over time. The character can hardly be regarded to be shaped in one's head or by one's mouth, so that thoughts or chatter alone should be regarded as sufficient to engrave a definite shape. Rather, one's choice is engraved by showing resolve in actions and behaviour. This view receives, for instance, support from a blunt and partly ironic entry in Kierkegaard's notebooks, where he discusses language: "The reason that everything is so easy to understand in the animal world is simple—it is because the animals have the advantage over human beings that they cannot talk. The only thing which talks in their existence is their life itself, their action."[423] In the same entry he

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422 Narve Strand, "Decision/Resolve," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome II: Classicism to Enthusiasm* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2016), 135.

423 JP 2337 (*Pap.* XI² A 222). I follow Pattison's translation of the entry; see his *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 80–81.

says that the ability to talk "confuses everything," leading to the following statement: "So it can happen that while a person's life expresses what is lowest, their mouth babbles on about the highest, and assures us that this is what is motivating them."[424] This suggests that actions are strongly valued over words by Kierkegaard—and such an interpretation is substantiated by his published writings on selfhood, for example his praise of lived experience and in his constant criticism of speculative thought. The action-orientation does not merely represent personal preference, for it is deeply ingrained in his subjective approach to philosophy. The bottom line is that the image people have of themselves in their private thoughts is likely to be biased and delusional—and the same applies to the story that they compose about who they are, the self-narrative of their imagination.

In *Fragments*, Climacus connects decisions and resolve to the concept of the instant. He calls the instant the "decision of eternity" (PF 58); he identifies the instant with a "new decision" (PF 111); and he states that "resolution which does not have an equal reciprocal relation to the occasion, must be from eternity, even though fulfilled in time," so that it becomes the instant, which "emerges precisely in the relation of the eternal resolution" (PF 25).[425] This talk of eternity is without doubt religiously charged—and the philosophically relevant points regarding the topic have been made in the previous subsection. In the current context, recall that Kierkegaard links the synthetic instant to action, but never to thought or chatter. Thus, his association of decisions and resolve with the instant supports the claim that character is engraved by actions rather than some sort of a narrative.

To make an ideal concrete in one's actual existence begins with a decision. The ongoing commitment to that decision, namely the resolve, is precisely what I referred to earlier as patience.[426] I have linked Kierkegaard's concept of patience to his concept of repetition—and the same applies of course to resolve. The ideal is initially imagined and brought to consciousness. Then it is acted upon, so that the content of one's consciousness is repeated in action, starting the process of actualisation. Then, in order to make the ideal increasingly concrete, the action must be enduringly repeated—and this is patience and resolve. What is repeated is not the action exactly as it manifested itself, which would be impossible, but rather to act again upon the same subjective intention. In a sense, resolve means to repeatedly

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424 Ibid. It is noteworthy that Kierkegaard also states in the entry that language will eventually ruin humanity, as it "spreads such a fog of drivel and trickery over the human race." Recall that linguistic capacity, according to him, establishes what is properly human—so, humanity's demise is hidden in its essential feature. Recall also the epigraph to this chapter where Žižek refers to Lacan's claim that language "*digs a hole in reality*."

425 See also CUP-I 272: "[A]t the point where the decision comes in the moment and the movement is forward toward the relation to the eternal truth that came into existence in time—at that point humour is not present."

426 See §2.3.5.

act upon the same decision in order to engrave a character and thus achieving the thick self, in the outward sense of the term. This is the process of self-becoming—and there is nothing mystical about it. Every practice in life relies on such repetition in actualising the possible, although the process might be more obvious in some fields than others: every professional swimmer or violin player, for example, would with introspection confirm that they have become who they are through such a process.

Rudd maintains that having a character, according to Kierkegaard, is equivalent to having a coherent personality, as was mentioned near the end of chapter one.[427] Coherence, however, is not the right term to accentuate in relation to Kierkegaard's concept of the self—and there is even nothing that suggests that an individual with a severely incoherent personality cannot be considered to achieve a character in the Kierkegaardian sense. Rather, the terms to be accentuated are decision, resolve, passion, one-sidedness, et cetera—by which a character can be engraved.[428] Moreover, in equating the self with having a character, Rudd addresses only one side of the coin. Even more important is the inwardness that takes responsibility for the character—one's self-consciousness and self-determining agency: one's core self, the subjective "I."

It is appropriate to conclude this chapter with the chariot analogy for selfhood in *Postscript*, where Climacus, who claims that passion is essential to proper existence, wonders how "one might bring a person into passion":

> [I]f a Pegasus and an old nag were hitched to a carriage for a driver not usually disposed to passion and he was told: Now drive—I think it would be successful. And this is what existing is like if one is to be conscious of it. Eternity is infinitely quick like that winged steed, temporality is an old nag, and the existing person is the driver, that is, if existing is not to be what people usually call existing, because then the existing person is no driver but a drunken peasant who lies in the wagon and sleeps and lets the horses shift for themselves. (CUP-I 311–312)

So, there is a driver and two horses, Pegasus and an old nag. Pegasus represents eternity and by extension the whole psychical side of the self-synthesis,[429] while the old nag represents the physical factors of finitude, necessity, and time.[430] The driver, however, represents the

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427 See §1.3.

428 However, Rudd's definition of a "person"—namely self-consciousness and awareness of having thoughts, feelings, and desires—does not contradict Kierkegaard's use of the term. Kierkegaard's terminology in relation to personhood and personality is ordinary and does not require special analysis.

429 Eternity is often used by Kierkegaard to signify the whole psychical side, including infinitude and possibility.

430 As I mentioned in an earlier footnote, "time" is to be preferred to "temporality" in this context.

self-determining agency that manages the synthesis. One's character, in this analogy, could be regarded as the direction in which the chariot moves and the features of the ground it covers. So, the process of self-becoming would consist in both the improvement of the driver's capacity to control the chariot and in the movement that the chariot makes. In the context of the first self and the deeper self, the old nag would represent the former element and Pegasus the latter one, while the driver would represent the thick self, to which both elements belong. Applying the conceptual framework of John McDowell to cast light on the contrast, the old nag could be identified as people's first nature and Pegasus as their second nature. The first nature is people's biological nature, according to which their behaviour can be predicted to follow instinctive patterns, while people "acquire second nature in part by being initiated into conceptual capacities, whose interrelations belong in the logical space of reasons."[431] This is in line with Kierkegaard's view on how spirit emerges in human beings, which I explained in the beginning of this chapter. In this regard, the conceptual framework of Harry Frankfurt can also be applied, according to which the old nag could be identified as people's first order desires, while Pegasus could be identified as people's second-order volitions.[432] First-order desires are instinctive desires of subjects, while higher-order volitions are desires about the desires—an overriding passion—preferably guided by reason and long-term convictions. In this scheme, freedom and moral responsibility reside in the human capacity to create higher-order volitions through a cognitive distance between ourselves as rational agents and our immediate emotions and desires. The inaccuracy in applying the analogy to the distinctions made by McDowell and Frankfurt is that their second nature and higher order volitions, respectively, would be a better fit for the driver rather than Pegasus. Still, they are helpful in illustrating the dynamic contrast that pervades the Kierkegaardian self.

431 John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996/1994), xx. In this respect, McDowell is influenced by Wilfrid Sellars and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

432 Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 1 (1971): 5–20; see particularly: 12–14. Scholarly interest in linking the ideas of Kierkegaard and Frankfurt bore the fruit of a collection of essays published as *Love, Reason, and Will*, eds. Anthony Rudd and John Davenport (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2015).

Chapter 3 Abyss of Becoming

> Recall how, for Kierkegaard, God's infallibility is also a negatively determined concept: its true meaning is that man is always wrong. This Kierkegaardian "infinite resignation" displays the structure of what, following Freud, [Jacques] Lacan calls *Versagung*: the radical (selfrelating) loss/renunciation of the very fantasmatic core of her being: first I sacrifice all I have for the Cause-Thing which is for me more than my life; what I then get in exchange for this sacrifice is the loss of this Cause-Thing itself.
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> — Slavoj Žižek[433]

3.1 Becoming signifies change

At the beginning of the introduction to this thesis, I stated that life is dynamic rather than static and that human beings are caught in a constant flux of change. I also stated that self-becoming basically refers to subjective development and character-formation. The previous chapter on Kierkegaard's concept of the self, contained an account of his concept of self-becoming (*Selv-Vorden*), because his notion of becoming (*Vorden*; *Tilblivelse*) is so integral to his notion of the self (*Selv*). In short, I explained Kierkegaard's notion of self-becoming in terms of an advancement of one's thick self, consisting in an inward cultivation of one's self-determining agency and an outward cultivation of character by applying the agency to the activity of actualising possibilities and making ideals concrete in one's life, in a perpetual process that requires subjective repetition. Thus, his concept of becoming emerges from the meaning he attributes to the self. Now, however, I will approach self-becoming from another angle, according to which my starting point is not the self, but the becoming aspect, the latter half of the composite word of self-becoming.

The two nouns for becoming in Danish, *Vorden* and *Tilblivelse*—and the corresponding verbs of *vorde* and *blive*—have similar meanings and can be treated as synonyms, in spite of slight differences in what they connote. As Claudine Davidshofer observes, the lexical meaning of *Vorden*, is "creation, coming into being, or development," while the referents of *blive* include "coming into existence" and "to undergo a change in quality, characteristic, state, or condition."[434] As should already be clear by the discussion in chapter two, and as will be further shown in this chapter, such definitions correspond well with how the term

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433 Slavoj Žižek, "Anxiety: Kierkegaard with Lacan," in *Annuals of Psychoanalysis* 35 (2007): 179; the article first appeared in the *Lacanian Ink* 26 (2005).

434 Claudine Davidshofer, "Being/Becoming," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome I: Absolute to Church* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 1995), 137. See also *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, vol. 2, cols. 820–831; and vol. 23, col. 1224.

"becoming" is used by Kierkegaard. He contrasts it with the Danish term for being, *Væsen*, which can refer to an individual, particularly an "individual's general character or natural disposition, as revealed through external behaviour or internal spiritual life."[435] This description corresponds to what I have referred to as inwardness and character.[436] But it is inwardness and character in a static condition, without the elements of dynamism and change, as is well captured by the verb-form—*være*, "to be"—which often denotes "to be in a settled state, condition, location, or position."[437]

Whatever the exact definitions of these terms may have been in Kierkegaard's lifetime, it is safe to assume that he did neither pick up the being-becoming dichotomy from Danish dictionaries nor through daily life in Copenhagen. Rather, it is uncontroversial that he adopted the terms from Hegel, who used them extensively in his *Science of Logic*. In short, Hegel explains the terms by stating that "becoming is the vanishing of being into nothing, and of nothing into being."[438] In other words, becoming is either the transition from being something to being nothing—such as a person who exists and then ceases to exist—or the transition from being nothing to being something—such as a person who does not exist but comes into existence. Thus, becoming is between the two poles of being and nothingness, which are distinct, but nevertheless identical: "Being and nothing are the same and, *precisely because they are the same, they no longer are being and nothing*, but possess a different determination; in becoming they were coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be[.][439] It can be deduced from this picture of existence that life is necessarily in the process of becoming while the stasis of being is associated with death. In other words, life can be described as a movement towards death, where the movement signifies the opposite of stasis: the dynamism of change. This is in line with Kierkegaard's philosophy of becoming. Still, as I addressed in chapter one, he became critical of Hegel's speculative philosophy, particularly what he sensed to be a framework of logical organic development, in which the notions of mediation and sublation play a role.[440] The perceived organicism that Kierkegaard railed against is well captured by Beiser when he says that "all Hegel's thinking essentially proceeds from an organic vision of the world, a view of the universe as a single vast living organism."[441] Such organicist reading of Hegel implies a deeply teleological outlook, according to which all development culminates

435 Ibid. See also *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, vol. 27, cols. 984–994.
436 See §2.3.7.
437 Davidshofer, "Being/Becoming," 137. See also *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, vol. 27, cols. 829–906.
438 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 81 (§21.93).
439 Ibid., 82 (§21.95).
440 See §1.3.
441 Beiser, *Hegel*, 80.

in an end-goal, the ultimate purpose of the universe and of everything in it. For an alternative to such a teleological organicism as a framework for becoming, Kierkegaard sought to develop his own anti-metaphysical view of becoming—and he found a practical ground for doing so in the conceptual armoury of Aristotle, namely his notion of *kinêsis*. In *Physics*, Aristotle identifies nature as the "source of motion and change."[442] He uses the terms *kinêsis* and *metabolê* to refer to such motion and change—and the former one becomes an umbrella term for both aspects, so that the motion consists in the process of change. The change in question, according to him, is an actualisation of potentiality, or as he puts it, "the actuality of that which exists potentially, insofar as it is potentially this actuality."[443] In explaining Aristotelian *kinêsis*, Christopher Shields observes that "no one English term has exactly the same semantic field of *kinêsis*," before stating that "we tend to reserve the term *motion* for one kind of change, change in location, so that *motion* will often be too restrictive for *kinêsis*." Shields points out that "in addition to change in location, Aristotle also recognizes growth, diminution, and simple alteration as kinds of change.[444] Thus, change is the best term to use for *kinêsis*, although it should be kept in mind that it has the connotations of motion or movement, designating a process, suggesting that the change is dynamic, although that might reasonably be viewed as a tautological and unnecessary addition.

The intellectual background to which Aristotle was partly responding by his notion of *kinêsis* was the metaphysical theories of the Eleatic School that emerged as a reaction to how Heraclitus viewed motion and change.[445] He taught that everything is radically in flux, in the sense that everything in the world is unstable and perpetually changing.[446] What was considered to be problematic with this outlook in antiquity, as Clare Carlisle stresses in her *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, is that it depicts "the appearance of solid, individual things" as "an illusion," resulting in the unappealing "conclusion that knowledge is impossible"[447] This applies to human beings as well, thus undermining their personal identity. Aristotle, who was far from satisfied with the equally radical solution of the Eleatics to simply deny the reality of change, suggested a view in which *kinêsis* refers to transition from *dunamis* to *energeia*, where the former refers to potentiality or capacity, and the latter

442 Aristotle, *Physics*, reissued, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 56 (Book III §200^{b}12).

443 Ibid., 57 (Book III §201^{a}10). Aristotle adds: "For example, the actuality of a thing's capacity for alteration, in so far as it is a capacity for alteration, is alteration."

444 Christopher Shields, *Aristotle*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014/2007), 482.

445 See §1.3.

446 Heraclitus is the first philosopher of becoming and Kierkegaard's view of his work is addressed below.

447 Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming: Movements and Positions* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), 10.

refers to actuality or activity. In this way, Aristotle's solution to the problem of change is to identify it in such a transition rather than in either potentiality or actuality. Thus, the concept of *kinêsis*, can be regarded as a "category of transition," as Carlisle puts it, signifying "a process of actualisation."[448] Such a transition is of course reminiscent of the one that takes place when possibilities are actualised according to the Dane. This casts light on a remark in *Repetition* where Constantius says that "the Greek view of the concept of κίνησις [*kinêsis*] corresponds to the modern category "transition" and should be given close attention" (R 149). I will soon address the category of transition, one version of which is Kierkegaard's concept of becoming, but there are two important comments that must at this point be made regarding *kinêsis*.

First, it would be the wrong track to go into details with regard to metaphysics, and this applies both to pre-Socratic pseudo-problems and their Aristotelian counterpart. As I have argued in previous chapters—in relation to my moderate theatrical interpretation in chapter one, as well as in the account of existential topography in chapter two—Kierkegaard should not be understood as searching for metaphysical solutions to metaphysical problems. Rather, his philosophy of becoming should be understood as an endeavour to overcome the system of metaphysical ontology in favour of an ultimately anti-metaphysical standpoint that corresponds to the subjective actuality of human existence. Such a point is well articulated by Schönbaumsfeld, when she says that "the ongoing process of existing—what Kierkegaard's pseudonyms call the 'process of becoming'—cannot . . . be fitted into timeless metaphysical categories except by dint of denying the existence of our selves altogether."[449] An indication of his light-hearted stance on alleged metaphysical problems is the humorous anecdote of Diogenes pacing "back and forth" to refute the Eleatics (R 131), which I mentioned in chapter one.[450] In the Epilogue to *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de Silentio also humorously brings up the thesis of Heraclitus that "one cannot walk through the same river twice," which was turned into its antithesis by his own disciple, who wished to advance the thesis further (FT 123). Moreover, it is significant that the account provided by Kierkegaard in relation to *kinêsis* is intertwined with his account of the category of repetition (R 148). In this regard, recall that I mentioned in chapter one that his philosophy of repetition is developed as an alternative to the perennial metaphysics that rejects change.[451]

448 Ibid., 12.
449 Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres*, 47.
450 See §1.3.
451 Ibid.

Secondly, Kierkegaard is merely seeking inspiration in the notion of *kinêsis* to develop his own concept of becoming and the new paradigm of thought that repetition represents, but he is not adopting the Aristotelian notion unaltered or adopting the context in which that notion emerged. This must be kept in mind, because the Aristotelian transition from potentiality to actuality is different from Kierkegaard's position in an important way, as is for instance evident from Shields's account: "Something has potentiality for becoming F or doing F-ish things when it has an internal principle for doing F-ish. Thus, some wood is potentially a house, while water vapour is not, and the eye has the capacity to see, while the sole of a leather shoe does not."[452] Shields adds that potentiality is in this way more "restrictive" than possibility—and it is restrictive in a way that comes close to the position that I have referred to as teleological organicism. The Aristotelian end-goal or *telos* is to flourish by realising one's essential qualities and thus approach the perfection of one's type. This applies only partly to Kierkegaard's notion of self-becoming, namely to the advancement of the self-determining agency and faculties, but it does not apply to Kierkegaardian actualisation of possibilities, where there is no "internal principle" to be realised, but rather a possibility that is chosen and brought in line with necessity and thus made actual. There is a difference, although it is sometimes a subtle one: the focus is not on developing inherent qualities, but to open up the field of possibilities by applying one's imagination in order to choose a viable option, which one subsequently strives to make concrete through repetition.

In *Postscript*, Climacus invokes the eternal and the temporal in order to distinguish between the stasis of being and the process of becoming. The stasis of being, "where everything is and nothing originates," is associated with "*sub specie aeterni*,"—that is to say, an eternal point of view—as well as with "the Eleatics' doctrine" (CUP-I 307).[453] It is a stance of "rest" and Climacus strongly advocates against such time-consciousness. His ideal, however, is "where everything is in the process of becoming, where only so much of the eternal is present that it can have a constraining effect in the passionate decision, where the *eternal* relates itself as the *future* to the *person in a process of becoming*" (CUP-I 307). In this way, instead of rest, one gains a "future." The concept of becoming is here clearly associated with what I have previously called a proper human temporality with the time-consciousness of the

[452] Shields, *Aristotle*, 490.

[453] In this regard, Jon Stewart draws attention to a note from 1837 where the "pure being" of the Eleatics is contrasted to the "existence," and the latter appears to be a reference to the Heraclitan view. Jon Stewart, "The Eleatics: Kierkegaard's Metaphysical Considerations of Being and Motion," in *Kierkegaard and the Greek World, Tome II: Aristotle and Other Greek Authors* (vol. 2 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), ed. Jon Stewart and Katalin Tun (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 131–132. (JP 1, 193; *Pap.* II C 37).

synthetic instant.[454] In a footnote to the passage, Climacus brings up Heraclitus, whom he champions against Hegel: "Misled by repeated talk about a continual process in which opposites combine in a higher unity and then again in a higher unity, etc., people have drawn a parallel between Hegel's doctrine and that of Heraclitus: all flows and nothing abides. This, however, is a misunderstanding, because everything that is said in Hegel about process and becoming is illusory" (CUP-I 307). The reason behind the apparent but false parallel is not only that Heraclitus is the philosopher of becoming in contrast to what Climacus and indeed Kierkegaard consider to be the false becoming in Hegel, but also that Heraclitus developed an idea of unity of opposites, reminiscent of Hegelian philosophy.[455] It is almost certain that Climacus represents Kierkegaard's views regarding all this, so the question must be what Heraclitus meant to the Dane. In that respect, Kierkegaard relied heavily on the account in his favourite book on ancient philosophy, Tennemann's *Geschichte der Philosophie*, and fortunately Kierkegaard's excerpt of what he found interesting in Tennemann's depiction of Heraclitus is preserved in his notebooks: "Fire is the force by which all change in the world becomes real. . . . Everything is constantly shifting and changing. . . . The law by which reason functions is an activity by which opposite determinations become actual."[456] So, as could have been predicted, the philosopher of becoming is the philosopher of change, in addition to features that are reminiscent of the Kierkegaardian process of actualising possibilities.

The passage in *Postscript* indicates that the contrast between becoming and being can be regarded as a feature of the contrast between the temporal and the timeless, so that the process of becoming is a feature of being-in-time. This is emphasised by Pattison, who states that "existence itself is a *process* of actualization; it is in constant transition, constant movement, and, therefore, is essentially temporal."[457] However, just as I have distinguished between the thin self and the thick self, it is necessary to make a distinction between *thin becoming*, signifying any temporal existence, and *thick becoming*, signifying temporal existence where human beings advance their subjectivity and character, namely when individuals engage in the task of self-becoming. It is also evident that what Kierkegaard is primarily

454 See §2.3.6.

455 This strongly indicates that Kierkegaard's own sets of opposites that characterise his relational view of selfhood should be regarded as remote from any Hegelian connection.

456 Finn Gredal Jensen, "Heraclitus: Presocratic Ideas of Motion, Change and Opposites in Kierkegaard's Thought," in *Kierkegaard and the Greek World, Tome II: Aristotle and Other Greek Authors* (vol. 2 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), ed. Jon Stewart and Katalin Tun (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 156–157 (SKS 19, 427.15–24, Not14:1). See also Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1798–1819), 209–239.

457 Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 66.

concerned with is becoming in the thick sense, to the extent that his conception of becoming is predominantly his conception of the human task, that is to say, a thick becoming towards a thick self. The notion of temporal self-becoming is a realistic rejection of the metaphysical theory that one's self somehow exists outside of time and change, as McDonald keenly observes, referencing *Concept of Anxiety*: "For Haufniensis, contra Plato, a self has not always been itself in a retrospective eternity, but must become itself in its eternal validity by means of an act of a freedom undertaken in time. Becoming a self is an event, which requires a change of state of one's self from potential (or "dreaming") spirit to self-conscious spirit (CA 91)."[458] The concept of "eternal validity," can be understood in both a secular and religious sense, as I will address at the end of this thesis in relation to immorality as judgement.[459] As he points out, becoming a thick self is essentially "an act of freedom undertaken in time"—which corresponds to my emphasis on the self-determining agency and its actualisation of possibilities.[460] Moreover, his description of self-becoming as an "event" where the dreaming—or dormant—spirit transitions to a self-conscious spirit is in line with my account of the qualitative leap of language acquisition through which the spirit emerges.[461] However, it is just the beginning of the process, the emergence of the thin self, while the thick self gradually emerges through the changes in the spirit, consisting in the advancement of one's self-consciousness and freedom, along with how the inward agency is applied to outwardly engrave a character.[462] McDonald adds that "in Aristotelian terms, Kierkegaard's analysis of becoming a self" consists in "an essential change of subject to a new subject in time, by a change of qualitative predicates."[463] Again, the qualitative change is true in relation to the effect of language on the human constitution, but after that time the change is not qualitative but rather quantitative. In this regard, it is important to note that the concept of being can have multiple meanings: it can refer to a time-consciousness attuned to the timeless, or to the nothingness or timelessness that is on either side of one's life—before birth and after death—but it also refers to each instant in contrast to the change between it and the next instant, each day in contrast to a different next one, each year in contrast to the next one, et cetera, so that the process of becoming is the change that happens from a point in time to a

458 William McDonald, "Time/Temporality/Eternity," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome VI: Salvation to Writing* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 165.

459 See §4.2.

460 See §2.3.5.

461 See §2.1.1.

462 See §§2.3.4–2.3.5 and §2.3.7.

463 McDonald, "Time/Temporality/Eternity," 167.

later point in time, where something new is constantly being brought into existence. In this sense, becoming signifies an actualisation of the possibility of change in existence.

The concept of becoming as such a process of change in contrast to being is discussed in a few works by Kierkegaard, but it is most thoroughly addressed in *Fragments* by Climacus in a segment titled "Coming Into Existence" (PF 73).[464] The meaning of the term "existence" is normally transparent by the context, but in the current context it should be observed, as the Hongs do in an endnote, that existence is limited to "temporal and spatial being or actuality," while such qualification does not apply to being.[465] Moreover, the Danish word used for coming into existence is *Tilblivelse* which is also rendered as becoming—and becoming is temporal, as I have addressed, and surely spatial as well. Climacus begins the segment by asking the following question: "How is that changed which comes into existence [blive til], or what is the change (κίνησις) [*kinêsis*] of coming into existence [*Tilblivelse*]?" (PF 73) The latter half of the question, which is a clarification of the former half, could be paraphrased as what sort of change takes place in the process of becoming. His discussion includes another question which is revealing for the point he seeks to make: "If in coming into existence, a plan is intrinsically changed, then it is not this plan that comes into existence; but if it comes into existence unchanged, what, then, is the change of coming into existence?" (PF 73) His reply is as follows: "This change, then, is not in essence [*Væsen*] but in being [*Væren*] and is from not existing to existing."[466] In commenting on this passage, Jamie Aroosi claims its meaning to be "simpler than it seems," considering that "Kierkegaard is trying to disassociate two ways in which we make sense of temporal change: either we understand each new moment as a process of cessation, which is to understand change as a matter of essence, or else we understand it as a process of birth, which is to understand change as a matter of being."[467] Whether or not Aroosi is correct in interpreting the text in this manner, he is crucially pointing towards the right direction. The purpose of Kierkegaard, via Climacus, is not to dabble at complex metaphysical theorising, as he sometimes seems to be doing, but rather to loosen the grip of a certain metaphysical perspective and suggest another perspective better suited to the actuality of life. The point

464 The discussion in this respect is similar across pseudonyms, e.g. by Climacus and Haufniensis, so it is likely to represent Kierkegaard's own views on the topic.

465 Howard and Edna Hong, "Editorial Appendix" to *Philosophical Fragments*, 297.

466 This is reflected in Jean-Paul Sartre's view of existentialism, captured in the slogan that existence precedes essence. See *Existentialism is Humanism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007/1946). However, the cornerstone of Sartre's standpoint is the view that people's self-choice and self-creative endeavour is boundlessly free, which arguably doesn't correspond to Kierkegaard's emphasis on the need to bring possibility in line with necessity. See §2.3.5.

467 Aroosi, *The Dialectical Self*, 107.

that Kierkegaard seeks to make is that becoming should be viewed as a "process of birth," in contrast to a perspective according to which, as Aroosi puts it, "the study of temporality becomes the study of the changing form of currently existing matter," so what we now believe we are experiencing is the temporal unfolding of the necessary relations of cause and effect."[468] This is basically the perspective of teleological organicism that I earlier identified as Kierkegaard's target. It generates determinism of some sort, as well as a system of subjectivity in the sense that he opposed.[469] The poverty of this outlook has to do with its negative and destructive relation to genuine freedom: "Rather than the unknown opening up in front of us, giving us the space to imagine how we might want to shape it, and which thereby allows us the possibility of freedom, we instead confront the known future, which we now have to simply accept. As a result, we become disempowered, never fully appropriating the freedom that is our nature."[470] The alternative of "process of birth," however, signifies freedom, which ruptures the immediacy of the natural world and through which something new is created in temporality. If this is a correct interpretation, as I will now demonstrate, it conceptually limits earthly becoming to people, the only linguistic beings on the planet and consequently the only beings to which self-determining agency can be attributed.

After explaining that becoming is a change in being, Climacus states that the "non-being that is abandoned by that which comes into existence must also exist," and in clarifying that point, the notion that he is arriving at is revealed: "But such a being that nevertheless is a non-being is possibility, and a being that is being is indeed actual being or actuality, and the change of becoming into existence is the transition from possibility to actuality" (PF 113). This is the change that becoming signifies. Now, the territory is familiar in light of what has been discussed in chapter two: the process of becoming is the process in which possibility becomes actuality. Accordingly, the phrase that I have borrowed from Aroosi, "process of birth," can be explained as the process where possibilities are actualised in one's existence through which ideals are made concrete in one's life, thus bringing forth, or giving birth to, meaningful change. When applied to selfhood, this means change in one's inwardness and character.[471] As I have established in chapter two, possibilities emerge through imagination and they are actualised by the function of the self as a freedom, a self-determining agency.[472]

468 Ibid., 108.
469 §See 1.2.1.
470 Aroosi, *The Dialectical Self*, 112.
471 See §2.3.7.
472 See §§2.3.3.–2.3.5.

In shaping its own actuality, the agency must also take responsibility for its actions and for the character it engraves. Moreover, this brings us of course back to repetition: the thick self is forged by repeatedly applying freedom to changing a chosen possibility to actuality, or as Climacus also puts it, changing something in the state of non-being to the state of being—and the non-being that first exists in one's imagination is thus subjectively repeated as being. This explains his statement on essence, because possibility, in essence, is subjectively repeated as actuality, although the outward manifestations are never exactly identical.

The most fundamental distinction in relation to Kierkegaard's concept of becoming is between what can be designated as the realm of freedom and the realm of nature. The former realm refers to the world of the human spirit, where the operative principle is freedom, while the latter realm refers to the natural world, determined by scientific laws. The realm of nature can also be referred to as natural inheritance or immediacy—and it includes the immediacy element in human beings.[473] Moreover, Kierkegaard often refers to the realm of nature simply as necessity, which raises the question of whether he should be regarded as a determinist in relation to nature or even as a necessitarian.[474] His pseudonyms often speak in such a manner, but I think it would be wrong to consider Kierkegaard to be committed to such a position. He was not in the business of making such claims. Furthermore, necessity in this context is not contrasted to natural contingency, but rather to human possibility and human freedom. It is not relevant to the point that Climacus is making whether nature can be contingent to some extent, because from the standpoint of human agency, it does not matter whether one is restricted by a natural condition that is necessary or one that relies on probabilities.[475] Thus, the necessity in question could be construed broadly to include natural contingency. In any case, Climacus categorically excludes the realm of nature from the change that the concept of becoming signifies—and thus restricts the concept to the realm of freedom:

> Can the necessary come into existence? Coming into existence is a change, but since the necessary is always related to itself and is related to itself in the same way, it cannot be

473 See 2.2.2.

474 The difference between determinism and necessitarianism is well explained by Steven Nadler in his *Spinoza's Ethics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006). The determinist position is that everything is "causally determined to exist as it is and to bring about the effects it does," depending on how the natural order was constituted in the beginning, while the more radical necessitarian position also applies to the necessity of the natural constitution, so that the "causal order of nature could not possibly have been otherwise than it is" (106). Nadler associates the latter position with Baruch Spinoza, so that "everything that happens *had* to happen, in the strongest possible sense: not just because its causes happened (this would be determinism), but because its causes themselves *had* to happen" (107).

475 It is in such a context that Richard Rorty states in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989) that "faced with the nonhuman, the nonlinguistic, we no longer have an ability to overcome contingency and pain by appropriation and transformation, but only the ability to *recognize* contingency and pain" (40). According to the contemporary scientific consensus, nature is partly contingent.

> changed at all. . . . Precisely by coming into existence, everything that comes into existence demonstrates that it is not necessary, for the only thing that cannot come into existence is the necessary, because the necessary *is*. (PF 74)

So, there is no "coming into existence," or becoming, when nature alters, for example by volcanic eruption, by the bloom of flowers, or by animals that obtain the skills to hunt. Such changes do not qualify as the changes that constitute becoming. Rather, the term "becoming" is conceptually defined as changes resulting from the human spirit, that is to say, generated by people's self-determining agency. It should be safe to attribute such a conceptual point to Kierkegaard, as it fits the context of his concern with becoming and corresponds with how the term is used across pseudonyms. It is more doubtful whether the same applies to the justification that Climacus provides, which is rooted in a view of the natural realm that is hard not to describe as strongly deterministic or necessitarian. While there is uncertainty regarding what happens in the realm of freedom, the natural realm is regarded as a causal chain being realised in time, so that one thing leads to another—and the end is hidden in the beginning. The concept of change is not considered to be appropriate in this context in a similar sense as there is no change to an equation in the process of solving it. Such a view is also applied to time, so that time in nature is specialised in the sense that the future becomes a terrain that can be explored. Aroosi illuminates the point by stating that what we perceive as change in nature "is merely our inability to perceive the entirety of 'time' at once, so that we only ever see a small fraction, thereby lending the appearance of change"—and he invokes a film metaphor to clarify the position: "just as a film exists in its entirety, even if we only ever watch it in sequence, this sequence creates the illusion of change, despite the fact that the whole film exists at once."[476] However, as I have indicated, I think that one must be careful in attributing such a position to Kierkegaard via Climacus or other pseudonyms. Kierkegaard's endeavour is not to speculate about the natural realm, but only to use it as a contrast to what he seeks to establish regarding human freedom, change, and temporality—to shake off a perspective he considers to be wrongheaded, according to which the radical uncertainty and open-endedness in relation to freedom is domesticated and integrated into what can variously be referred to as the natural realm, organicism, or the logical system, so that freedom is reduced to mere fate.[477] In this respect, Kierkegaard can even be viewed as an early advocate against the trap of the so-called "physics envy," according to which social

476 Aroosi, *The Dialectical Self*, 115.

477 This does not mean, however, that he is more favourable towards freedom as licence, as will be addressed at the end of this chapter in relation to the abyssal ground of freedom. See §3.2.3.

sciences attempt to acquire the mathematical precision of the natural sciences. Although Aroosi's account can be regarded as flawed in the way I am describing, he captures well the relevant contrast by saying that "while the natural world might operate according to a simple causality that we perceive as a process of endless cessation, the moment we act, the moment we make a choice and modify the 'natural' flow of nature, we make our mark on the world."[478] He proceeds by stating that "whereas prior to the existence of human action it could be argued that the operative principle behind the world was the simple causality we find in nature, once we act, we interrupt this flow, altering the world in a way that is not directly or immediately determined by our own necessity."[479] In other words, people are in a position to at least to some extent overcome their natural immediacy through the control that their self-determining agency brings—enabling them to shape themselves and to determine their own future. What is brought into existence through such endeavour is what constitutes the change of becoming, the Kierkegaardian *kinêsis*, the transition from non-being to being, or from possibility to actuality.

3.2 The pathos and despair of the task

In the previous section a distinction is made between a thin and thick sense of the process of becoming. In its thin sense, becoming signifies the dynamism of temporal existence. In its thick sense, becoming signifies *properly existing*, where one is engaged in the dynamism of temporality with subjective intensity and pathos. As I have mentioned, Kierkegaard is primarily concerned with becoming in the latter sense—where becoming emerges as a task to be achieved instead of merely being a condition of life. The stasis of being to which it is contrasted can for instance be manifested to some extent in a mode of living characterised by objectivity and abstract thought, as Climacus makes clear. "But what is existence?" he asks, and his reply is as follows: It is that child who is begotten by the infinite and finite, the eternal and the temporal, and is therefore continually striving. . . . Only the systematicians and the objectivists have ceased to be human beings and have become speculative thought, which dwells in pure being" (CUP-I 92). In this segment of *Postscript*, he is directing his criticism at systematicians and his claim that only they fail in the task of existing should not be understood literally. Rather, he is mentioning them as an example of such deficiency. In Kierkegaard's writings, the criticism in question is at times also directed against religious mysticism, as for instance Judge William does in *Either/Or*: "The mystic chooses himself

478 Aroosi, *The Dialectical Self*, 115.
479 Ibid.

abstractly; one can therefore say that he is continually choosing himself out of the world, but as a result he cannot choose himself back into the world again" (EO-I 249). By choosing themselves abstractly, such mystics fail in properly attuning to temporal existence and thus do not properly engage in the process of becoming. In this regard, Judge William elaborates on his point by considering how such mystics might answer a question on life's meaning. He suggests that they might reply that "the meaning of life is to know God and to fall in love with him," but this, according to the Judge, "is not an answer to the question, for here the meaning of life is understood as an instant, not as a succession" (EO-I 249). Recall that the instant is associated with the eternal—and by contrasting it to succession, the Judge is stating that the whole dimension of time is lacking.[480] In commenting on this passage, Jack Mulder correctly observes that the criticism levelled by the Judge against this mentality is part of a "fundamental objection," which is essential "to the structure of Kierkegaard's work," namely that "the mystic fails to make the movement to genuine selfhood, instead of preferring to cast herself into infinity and eternity at the expense of the finite and temporality, all the while failing to notice that the human self is ineluctably finite and temporal along with infinite and eternal."[481] Viewed in this light, it becomes clear how the synthesis of selfhood, which I account for in chapter two, must be chosen, constituted and upheld by the self-determining agency in order to properly engage in the process of self-becoming. Otherwise, one is not grounded in temporal existence and not able to generate the change that becoming signifies through a process that requires finitude and infinitude, necessity and possibility, reality and ideality. It must be noted that although intellectuals and mystics of a certain sort receive criticism, Kierkegaard is not expressing an anti-intellectual or anti-religious point, but only advocating for a stance where the task of existing is not neglected. His vision is well captured by Climacus's statement that "one would believe that a thinker leads the richest human life—so it was in Greece," which is praise for Socrates, who is not only praised for being an existing thinker, but also "an existing work of art" (CUP-I 303).

The existential choice that is required, according to Judge William, is a "concrete choice," where one chooses oneself "back into the world" simultaneously to choosing oneself "out of the world" (EO-I 249). Although the description is reminiscent of the movements of infinite resignation and faith, which I will address later in this chapter, the Judge is not describing faith in this context, but rather the choice that establishes one's proper temporality, enabling

480 See §2.3.6.

481 Jack Mulder, Jr., *Mystical and Buddhist Elements in Kierkegaard's Religious Thought* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 23.

a process of becoming in a thick sense. A special care is needed before the views of the Judge are attributed to Kierkegaard, but in this respect Kierkegaard's position is most likely being expressed, as receives support from the account of self-becoming in *Sickness*, where Anti-Climacus introduces the concept through the movements of infinitude and finitude, resulting in a concrete existence.[483] It is in choosing such concreteness and by implementing such choice through one's actions that one facilitates the change of becoming. The existential choice is not necessarily a conscious decision: it can be a disposition made through one's temperament and approach to life—and it occurs prior to the decisions and resolve through which one's character is shaped.[484] The choice that grounds one in temporality turns a person into someone who properly exists—and, as Climacus states in *Postscript*, "for an existing person, the goal of motion is decision and repetition" (CUP-I 312). The term "motion" in this context refers to the Kierkegaardian *kinêsis*: the change that occurs when possibilities are actualised. Such change is achieved through the acts of deciding and repeating.

In a passage that is worthy of attention, Climacus claims that "to act in the eminent sense belongs essentially to existing *qua* human being" (CUP-I 304). To exist "*qua* human being" is a reference to an existence that is properly temporal, in the sense I have discussed, and where one properly engages in the process of becoming. So, human action, "in the eminent sense" is associated with such existence, thus further supporting my claim in chapter two regarding the significance of action.[485] Climacus continues as follows:

> By acting, by venturing the decisive thing (which every human being is capable of doing) in utmost subjective passion and in full consciousness of an eternal responsibility, one comes to know something else, also that to be a human being is something other than year in and year out pinning something together into a system. By essentially existing *qua* human being, one also gains a responsiveness to the comic. (CUP-I 304)

So, an eminent human action is described in terms of "venturing the decisive thing" and to do so "in utmost subjective passion." Moreover, a notion of "an eternal responsibility" is immediately brought up in relation to such action, which arguably supports the role I gave to responsibility in character formation.[486] The gain of being attuned to temporal existence

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483 See §2.3.3. Kierkegaard's concept of existence (*Eksistens*) is so strongly associated with concreteness that it is often the key word of its definition, such as in Roberts, "Existence, Emotions, and Virtue": "Existence denotes the concreteness and individuality of a life lived in time" (178).

484 See §2.3.7.

485 Ibid.

486 See §2.3.5 and §2.3.7. See also §4.2.2 where immortality as judgement is addressed; it casts light on the meaning of eternal responsibility.

in such a manner is, among other things, "responsiveness to the comic," which is lost to those whose mode of living is marked by objective systems or esoteric fixations.

The passion that Climacus mentions in the passage is a key term in order to understand a pressing issue with regard to the task of becoming, namely what motivates people to engage in such striving, which is full of suffering and despair, as I will soon discuss.[487] The answer is to be found in the interrelated notions of passion (*Lidenskab*) and pathos (*Pathos*). As is observed by Ferreira, Kierkegaard tends to equate the two notions—and he links both of them to subjectivity and inwardness (CUP-I 33 & 242).[488] However, in an endnote she claims the category of passion to be broader than the category of pathos, with reference to a footnote in *Postscript* where Climacus says that "earthly passion hinders existing by changing existence into the momentary" (CUP-I 312); the point being that such hinderance cannot be caused by pathos. [489] However, Jacobo Zabalo considers pathos to be the broader of the categories, so that pathos has two aspects, one of which is expressed by the term "passion" and another which is expressed by the term "suffering" (*Lidelse*).[490] I will generally favour the term "pathos" in this context and I will use it in a broad sense, so that it refers simultaneously to a powerful feeling that is a motivational impetus in the process of becoming, and to a suffering in an existential sense—where both aspects reflect the ambivalent emotion of pathos.[491]

The root of what is "pathos-filled," according to Climacus, is the "misrelation" between the "infinite and the finite, the eternal and becoming" (CUP-I-89). So, pathos emerges in the contrast of selfhood, which I explained in chapter two—and it grows in relation to an idea, so that "when the subjective existing thinker turns his face towards the idea, his interpretation

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487 When Climacus e.g. states that "becoming a subjective individual is the highest task assigned to every human being" (CUP-I 133), he is referring to the task of becoming, which partly consists of such subjective advancement, as was addressed in chapter two. See §1.2.1.

488 M. Jamie Ferreira, "Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 223. See also JP III, 427). In a later work, Ferreira states that the "discussion of pathos is the culmination of all the earlier attempts in *Postscript* to highlight 'inwardness' and passion." Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, 133.

489 Ferreira, "Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap," 233–234.

490 Jacobo Zabalo, "Passion/pathos," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome V: Objectivity to Sacrifice* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 55. Still, Kierkegaard's use of the terms sometimes seems to diverge from such conceptual understanding; see e.g. JP III, 3129.

491 The role of pathos in Kierkegaard's philosophy can be compared to the role that the duty to cultivate one's natural powers has in Kant's philosophy: "A human being has a duty to himself to cultivate (*cultura*) his natural powers (powers of spirit, mind, and body), as means to all sorts of possible ends.—He owes it to himself (as a rational being) not to leave idle and, as it were, rusting away the natural predispositions and capacities that his reason can some day use." Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: CUP, 1996/1797), 565 (§6:445).

of the misrelation is pathos-filled" (CUP-I-89). Notice that Climacus opposes becoming to the eternal in the quoted lines. It is best understood as part of Kierkegaard's tendency to associate becoming with the temporality of being-in-time, in contrast to the timelessness of the eternal. Climacus's reference to infinitude and finitude, signifies all the oppositional sets, so the contrast in which pathos emerges and grows is the contrast created when the realm of possibilities and ideals is opened up through one's imagination. The idea to which pathos stands in relation can be one's ideal self that one strives to make concrete in the process of becoming. Such vision inspires meaning, in the sense that one's temporal existence acquires a definite purpose.

However, there is also a different sort of purpose that is associated with one's fundamental horizon of meaning. In this regard, recall that in chapter one I defined Kierkegaard's notion of existence-spheres as broad categories of life-views—and that the broadest classification consists in a binary distinction between an aesthetic mode of living and an ethical-religious mode of living.[492] Recall also that I claimed each of these modes of living to have their own *telos*—happiness in aesthetic striving and blessedness in religious striving.[493] Climacus devotes a segment of *Postscript* to pathos in relation to the *telos* of blessedness, or "eternal happiness," as *Salighed* is often translated: "The pathos that corresponds to and is adequate to an eternal happiness is the transformation by which the existing person in existing changes everything in his existence in relation to the highest good" (CUP-I 389). The pathos that has such a transformative power is designated as an "existential pathos"—and it is effective because it manages to transform an individual "into the actuality of the idea." (CUP-I 387). Thus, an existential pathos can be viewed as an emotion that accompanies one's agency in making the purpose concrete in one's life. So, it is not surprising that pathos is associated with the interestedness that was mentioned in chapter two: "Ethically the highest pathos is the pathos of interestedness (which is expressed in this way, that I, acting, transform my whole existence in relation to the object of interest)" (CUP-I 390). The significance of human action in this regard is emphasised by Climacus, "the pathos of the ethical is to act," according to him, and a few pages later he states that the pathos lies in what the individual expresses in existence: "the pathos lies not in testifying to an eternal happiness but in transforming

[492] See §1.2.1.

[493] As I argued in §1.2.1, this *telos* is non-teleological in a cosmic sense, even more so than the vague *telos* of Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, because it is grounded in a prior "choice" of mode of living. I use scare quotes for choice, because although I have referred to transitions between spheres as a choice, it is not a choice in the normal sense of the term, as I will explain in §3.3.2 on forms of life and aspect dawning.

one's own existence into a testimony to it" (CUP-I 390 & 394).[494] In other words, a purpose is not actualised in words or thought, but by being manifested in action. Later in the work the point is reiterated in clear and general terms: "From the preceding portion it must be recalled that existential pathos is action or the transformation of existence" (CUP-I 431). So, it is vital to Climacus to associate all existential pathos to action that has an impact in changing one's temporal existence. This includes the pathos which motivates the cultivation of one's inwardness and the engraving of one's character.

The *telos* to which one's existential pathos relates determines to some extent the nature of one's subjective development. In this sense, there are avenues of existential pathos, so to speak, which depend on the *telos* in question. Multiple such existential avenues can be posited based on various life-views, not confined to the binary or ternary categories of the existence-spheres. The avenues add another dimension to the process of becoming by directing one's inwardness and character to a certain path. If, for example, individuals relate themselves absolutely to an eternal *telos*, the initial expression of the pathos is a "resignation" (CUP-I 394), in the sense that Merold Westphal explains well in *Becoming a Self*: "If my highest good is an infinite good, namely eternal happiness, then all finite goods, namely, all temporal happiness, will have to be 'surrendered' for its sake."[495] However, the "decisive expression" for a "pathos-filled relation" to such *telos*, according to Climacus, is "the consciousness of guilt" (CUP-I 527). The precondition of the existential guilt is established by the strict demands of the *telos* to surrender finite goods: "As soon as the eternal happiness is removed, guilt-consciousness also essentially drops out" (CUP-I 533).

I suggested above that suffering is an essential aspect of all pathos, but it is most strongly associated with religious pathos, as will be addressed in relation to the existence-spheres later in this chapter. Existential pathos motivates change through action, but there is much frustration involved in such effort, as individuals find themselves falling short in self-creation, or "*skabe sig selv om*," leading to suffering—and Climacus calls such suffering "the highest action of the inner world" (CUP-I 433). Moreover, and even more importantly, Climacus states in *Fragments* that "all coming into existence is a *suffering*" (PF 74), by which he is referring to the change generated by the process of actualising possibilities. The

494 Climacus adds that "aesthetically the highest pathos is the pathos of disinterestedness" (CUP-I 390). He also calls a pathos that fails to actualise the possible as an "aesthetic pathos" (CUP-I 387). In both these cases, the term "aesthetic" is best understood in its frivolous sense (see §2.3.6). In §3.2.1 I will discuss the existence-spheres and how to understand the notion of the "ethical" in this context.

495 Merold Westphal, *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1996), 152.

most obvious interpretation of such suffering is that one can hardly achieve the transitions of becoming without at least expecting blood, sweat, and tears.

Kierkegaard's notion of despair (*Fortvivlelse*) can be described as a type of suffering—and it is closely connected to the task of becoming, although in a different way to pathos. In chapter two, despair was described as a misrelation in selfhood and a sickness of the spirit due to wrong use of freedom.[496] In order to explain the concept, the appropriate place to start is the lexical meaning of the Danish term, *Fortvivlelse*, in addition to connotations that result from its etymological roots. As William McDonald explains, the term refers to "deep psychic distress characterized by despondency, hopelessness and grief," as well as denoting "desperation."[497] So, suffering from despair refers to undergoing such a condition. The despondency that Kierkegaard is referring to by "despair" is not distress because of something in particular, although it may seem so, but rather a general distress in relation to oneself.[498] "Hopelessness" is the term that is most often invoked to describe despair, in line with the Latin origin of the word "despair": it is composed of the prefix "de," literally meaning "down from," and the word "sperare," meaning "hope." Thus, the Latin "desperare," as its English variant, refers to complete loss or absence of hope.[499] The Danish term, however, is composed of "for," which is an intensifying prefix, and "tvivl," which is the word Kierkegaard uses for doubt, but for which the direct meaning is to be of two minds, so that the mind is split in two instead of being unified, corresponding to double-mindedness in English. The literal meaning of the Danish term is thus intensified doubt, signifying an intensified split within the mind or the self. So, such etymological analysis brings us to despair as a certain misrelation in selfhood—and in light of my account of the Kierkegaardian self in chapter two it is evident that the misrelation in question can be viewed as a deficiency in synthesising the physical factors and the psychical ones, or, from another perspective, a deficiency in combining the first self-element and the deeper one. The main grounds for this interpretation is the account of Anti-Climacus in *Sickness*, the work in which despair is most comprehensively discussed.[500] As an example, he states that a "a self that has no possibility is in despair, and

496 The description was provided in context to a comparison to anxiety in §2.1.2. See Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses*, 29, and Arbaugh and Arbaugh, *Kierkegaard's Authorship*, 297.

497 William McDonald, "Despair," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome II: Classicism to Enthusiasm* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 159. See also *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, vol. 5, cols. 1028–9.

498 See e.g. SUD 19.

499 The same applies to the Old French and Norman versions that were intermediary between the Latin term and the English one.

500 *Either/Or* and *Works of Love* also include extensive discussion on despair.

likewise a self that has no necessity" (SUD 35).[501] In such a context it is also clear that despair signifies the sickness of the spirit, because it is the spirit as the structuring force of the self that applies freedom to combine and synthesise elements, as well as to uphold the tension between them. In this sense the misrelation in question can be viewed as a wrong use of freedom. According to Anti-Climacus, an individual can even be in despair without awareness of it, but "as soon as despair becomes apparent," it becomes retrospectively evident that all along "the individual was in despair" (SUD 24). The awareness of such sickness brings one "dialectically closer" to being healed (SUD 26), but an enhanced consciousness also increases the intensity of the despair (SUD 42), so the same advancement that may prepare the ground for the cure also heightens the suffering.[502]

Moreover, the misrelation can signify how the spirit relates to itself as synthesis and how it relates to the character it engraves by its actions. Anti-Climacus makes various distinctions in relation to such despair, the primary one being between the despair of not willing to be oneself (SUD 49), on the one hand, and the despair of willing to be oneself (SUD 67), on the other hand. The former type is associated with weakness and can be described as self-loathing, while the latter type is associated with defiance and can be described as hubris in self-creation, of wishing to constitute oneself from scratch. A despair resulting from such misrelation emerges, as McDonald points out, "once a human being has become conscious of the task of becoming a self so that the will is engaged in that task."[503] Thus, it can be said that while pathos motivates the task of becoming, despair accompanies all aspects of the task, as well as affecting its direction by its own kind of suffering.

Aroosi interprets Kierkegaardian despair as "the activity of willing to be something that we are not, so that we do not have to accept responsibility for what we are."[504] Such a reading can be considered an attractive philosophical construction of the notion, but it must be noted that Anti-Climacus writes about despair from an expressly Christian point of view, which is not surprising in light of him being described by Kierkegaard as his genuinely Christian pseudonym, invented to represent a Christian ideal in a dialectical context (PV 205).[505] The account of the self in *Sickness* can justifiably be attributed to Kierkegaard, as it is supported

501 He also states that an "infinitude's despair is to lack finitude" (SUD 30) and that a "finitude's despair is to lack infinitude" (SUD 33). This applies to the whole synthesis of selfhood.

502 Despair is not a rarity, according to Anti-Climacus, but a "universal" condition (SUD 26.

503 McDonald, "Despair," 163.

504 Aroosi, *The Dialectical Self*, 37.

505 JP VI 6464 (*Pap.* X[1] A 615), *n.d.*, 1849. See discussion in §1.1.2 and §1.2.2. Anti-Climacus e.g. states the following: "The possibility of this sickness [of despair] is man's superiority over the animal; to be aware of this sickness is the Christian superiority over the natural man; to be cured of this sickness is the Christian's blessedness" (SUD 15).

by various other writings across pseudonyms. The same arguably applies to the account of despair that I have provided here, which stands in close relation with the notion of selfhood that I have presented, but it is questionable to attribute the more religious aspect of despair to Kierkegaard, at least as a *philosopher*.

3.3 The venue of the existence-spheres

3.3.1 The aesthetic and the ethical-religious

There are many different modes of living, according to Kierkegaard, depending on the life-view that people adopt and their subsequent horizon of meaning.[506] This is connected to my previous account of happiness and blessedness as alternative ultimate purposes of human existence, depending on the broad categories of life-views.[507] Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms refer to such categories as either "stages of existence" (*Existents-Stadier*) or "spheres of existence" (*Existents-Sphærer*)—and they can be regarded as a venue for subjective development and character-formation, or the task of self-becoming.[508] Three such spheres are identified in Kierkegaard's writings—the aesthetic sphere, the ethical sphere, and the religious sphere—as is for example expressed by the pseudonymous author Frater Taciturnus in *Stages on Life's Way* (SLW 476). However, in line with what I have touched upon in relation to purposes, Taciturnus states that "the ethical sphere is only a transition sphere," thus indicating that a binary distinction can also be made between an aesthetic mode of living and an ethical-religious one. The binary distinction receives support from *Postscript* where Climacus more than once refers to the "ethical-religious sphere" (CUP-I 519, 534 & 561).[509] Such distinction corresponds to the duplexity in Kierkegaard's body of work, namely the dialectical structure that I addressed in chapter one.[510] However, instead of reducing the triad to a duality, it is also possible to go in the opposite direction and make further distinctions within each sphere. The aesthetic one can, for example, be divided into an "immediate pole" and a "reflective pole," while the religious one consists of "religiousness A" and "religiousness B." Moreover, as is stated by Climacus in *Postscript*, irony as a mode

506 See an introduction to Kierkegaard's notion of life-views in §1.2.1.

507 See an account of *telos* in §1.3 and §3.2.

508 The latter term, "spheres of existence," is to be preferred for a reason that I will explain in §3.3.4. References to the existence-spheres are scattered throughout Kierkegaard's writings. The most explicit account of them in Kierkegaard's signed writings appears in his autobiographical works of *On My Work as an Author* and *The Point of View* (see e.g. PV 5–6 and 43), but I seriously questioned the reliability of those works in §1.2.2—and in §3.3.4 I will criticise and reject the picture of the existence-sphere that they depict.

509 See also references to the "ethical-religious" in CUP-I 119, 198, 396, 426, 434, 467, 481, and 547.

510 See e.g. §1.1.1. Despite the unreliable status of the autobiographical writings as evidence for interpretation, it can still be noted that a binary distinction is also implied in those writings, e.g. in context of the "duplexity" that is claimed to be found in the "whole authorship" (PV 30).

of living can be viewed as an intermediary mode between the aesthetic and the ethical spheres, while humour as a mode of living can be placed in between the ethical and the religious spheres (CUP-I 531n). In fact, it seems appropriate to view the existence-spheres as an inconclusive groundwork rather than a definitive scheme.

There is no consensus on how to interpret the existence-spheres. Mark C. Taylor identifies "four basic ways in which the stages can be understood': (1) "as stages in Kierkegaard's own development;" (2) "as stages in the development of world history;" (3) "as ideal personality types;" (4) "as the stages in the development of the individual self."[511] These options are not mutually exclusive—and passages can be found in Kierkegaard's writings that support each of them. Taylor maintains that a mixture of options three and four best represents the core meaning of the existence-spheres. His side-lining of options one and two are reasonable, as Kierkegaard does not intend the notion of the existence-spheres to be autobiographical, even though he may have sought inspiration in his own experience, and if he would have been so concerned with "world history," he would have said more about it. However, in contrast to Taylor I argue against option four, because it implies what I refer to as a teleological interpretation of the existence-spheres, which I rejected in chapter one and which I will further discuss in the next subsection. I claim that a version of option three is the correct one, in the sense that the existence-spheres represent certain "personality types," dependent on a development within the self—which in this context is best captured by the struggle between the first self-element and the deeper one—as well as being manifested in certain categories of life-views.[512] Furthermore, although one must be careful in attributing to Kierkegaard any views of the pseudonyms in this regard, Taciturnus most likely captures an important aspect of Kierkegaard's notion of the existence-spheres when he stresses that they refer to how people concretely exist in contrast to, for instance, metaphysical speculations: "The metaphysical is abstraction, and there is no human being who exists metaphysically. The metaphysical, the ontological, is, but it does not exist, for when it exists it does so in the aesthetic, in the ethical, in the religious, and when it is, it is the abstraction from or a *prius* to the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious" (SLW 476). Thus, not all life-views can be associated with the existence-spheres, but only ones that bear relation to modes of living where life is not reduced to thought—and the modes in question are determined by the tension within the self.

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511 Mark C. Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1975), 62–63.

512 See §1.2.1 and §2.2.

In his paper, "Kierkegaard's Non-Dialectical Dialectic or That Kierkegaard is not Hegelian," Henry B. Piper puts the framework of the existence-spheres in context of the tension within the self in a way that is analogous to my view, although his overall account has a different focus from mine.[513] In line with my account of the Kierkegaardian self, Piper connects the struggle of the first self and the deeper self to the synthetic view of selfhood. He claims that "the struggle of these 'two selves,' with themselves and with each other, manifests the dialectical struggle of the self as synthesis."[514] To what extent and in what way the two models of selfhood correspond to each other is open to debate, but it should at least be observed that the first self-element resembles the physical factors and the deeper self-element resembles the psychical factors.

The aesthetic sphere signifies a mode of living characterised by the first self, either prior to a proper development of the deeper self—which I have referred to as a frivolous aestheticism—or to the dominance of the first self after a proper development of the deeper self—which might for instance be reflected in Kierkegaard himself when he identifies as a poet, even after the ambivalent wonders of the ethical-religious dimension had opened up to him in its entirety.[515] The pseudonymous author of the bulk of the first part of *Either/Or*, whom we know by the single letter "A," is the main representative of an aesthetic mode of living.[516] He is depicted as a frivolous aesthete by Judge William in the second part of the work, as I will address, but the dialectical structure of the work and of Kierkegaard's whole authorship, strongly suggests that the criticism of Mr. A by the Judge should be understood with a grain of salt—and not attributed unprocessed to Kierkegaard, as the Judge appears to be biased and prejudiced in his criticism, in a manner that the ultimate author of the work is arguably not. The prejudice can, for instance, be considered to be evident in the claims of the Judge that his aesthetic counterpart is incapable of properly making decisions, taking responsibility and of acquiring a self in the thick sense of the term.

In chapter two I associated the first self with the Freudian ego—and just as the ego is the conscious front of the id, the first self is a conscious front of immediacy.[517] The immediate and the reflective poles of the aesthetic sphere represent these features of the first self. Pure

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513 Henry B. Piper, "Kierkegaard's Non-Dialectical Dialectic or That Kierkegaard is not Hegelian," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2004):): 497–517. Piper doesn't discuss the personality types of *Either/Or*, as I'll do, and his focus is on complexities in the struggle of the first self and the deeper self, that I find questionable and which I'll not cover.

514 Ibid., 499.

515 See §1.2.2. Whether or not Kierkegaard can be categorised as such an aesthete, the prime representative of such aestheticism among major philosophers is arguably Nietzsche.

516 The papers are edited by another pseudonym, Victor Emerita.

517 See §2.2. See also Nordentoft, *Kierkegaard's Psychology*, 40 et al.

immediacy is only a pre-linguistic mode of living, but it continues to be a preeminent feature of the first self after the human spirit emerges with language. The personification of this feature is the character of Don Juan in *Either/Or*, whose dominant drives are those which I have associated with immediacy: natural instincts and sensuous desires.[518] Both positive and negative aspects of Don Juan are apparent, so that the essential ambivalence of immediacy is highlighted. On the positive side, he represents a stimulating "inner vitality" (EO-I 134): a primitive life-force that is full of spontaneous vigour, simple joy, passionate frenzy, and the adventure of erotic love (*Elskov*). His fundamental nature is said to be captured by the music of Mozart's "champagne aria": "Such is his life, effervescing like champagne. And just as the beads in this wine, as it simmers with an internal heat, sonorous with its own melody, rise and continue to rise, just as the lust for enjoyment resonates in the elemental boiling that is his life" (EO-I 134). With such an aesthetic richness and beauty in mind it is not hard to agree with James Collins that the basic meaning of Don Juan is "to remind us that no conception of human existence is adequate, which cannot find a distinctive place for sensuous experience and the full play of the passions."[519] Even so, Don Juan's energy is not without ambivalence, because it signifies deep anxiety, which brings us to his negative aspects: his life "is the full force of the sensuous, which is born in anxiety"—and "this anxiety is precisely the demonic zest for life" (EO-I 129).[520] The downside of anxiety can be regarded at its purest in immediacy, but it still belongs to all human life, across existence-spheres. The negative aspect that is more specific to Don Juan and immediacy in general is of course the destructiveness of untampered lust: the control of a reflective and rational agency is needed to prevent desires and appetites from playing havoc. His impulses are strong and resourceful, but they are also animalistic, untamed by the domesticating features of civilisation. Don Juan is not aware of such problems in his unreflective state of pure immediacy, but after the spirit emerges, the self-consciousness develops, and there is no way to exist in such immediacy, even though it continues to be an element of one's selfhood and life.[521]

The agency of the first self emerges with consciousness and the possibility for reflection, as applies to the ego as well. The reflective pole of the aesthetic sphere corresponds to such

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518 Don Juan is a fictional character who became a legendary subject of folktales as the ultimate libertine and womaniser. The first known version of the legend was written by the Spanish writer Tirso de Molina in the 17th century, but the story of Don Juan captured Kierkegaard's imagination through the well-known opera from 1787 by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The name of the opera is *Don Giovanni*, which is the Italian version of Don Juan. Kierkegaard went to see the opera many times because it struck a chord with him.

519 James Daniel Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (Princeton NJ: PUP, 1953), 52.

520 However, it is made clear by A that Don Juan does not suffer from despair. This is in line with my account of anxiety (see §2.1) as well as my account of despair (see §3.2).

521 See §2.1, 2.2, and §2.3.4.

agency. The reflective aesthetes in *Either/Or* are the characters of Faust[522] and Ahasverus,[523] as well as the pseudonyms of Mr. "A" and Johannes the Seducer.[524] The first two represent extravagant features of the self, brought about by the emergence of the human spirit and the development of self-consciousness and freedom, including a capacity for reflection and a capacity to hope. In Kierkegaard's scheme of things, Faust primarily symbolises the doubt (*Tvivl*) that accompanies reflection as its downside, while Ahasverus primarily symbolises the despair (*Fortvivlelse*) that signifies the downside of freedom and hope. Recall the link I made between despair and intensification of doubt, which is likely to be part of the meaning: hopelessness, after all, can be described as a radical doubt in relation to future prospects.[525] It is important to observe that, as applies to anxiety, the problems of doubt and despair are not confined to an aesthetic mode of living, because they are part of the human condition in any mode of living, according to Kierkegaard, except in the context of a religious ideal, but it is not certain whether such an ideal can ever be fully actualised. The same applies to the problem of overblown reflection, from which reflective aesthetes are prone to suffer: it is also a problem that accompanies the human spirit, across existence-spheres. This condition signifies the theoretical speculation of an observer that Taciturnus contrasts to every sort of proper existence, on the one hand, and endless consideration of possibilities without decision and resolve, on the one hand. Faust suffers from excessive reflection, but he is also frequently depicted in positive terms in the authorship, for instance in *Fear and Trembling*, where Johannes de Silentio states the following: "Faust has a sympathetic nature, he loves existence, his soul knows no envy" (FT 109). In *Either/Or*, close connection is made between the figures of Faust and Don Juan: the former aesthete is motivated by reflective desire and he is described as the "spiritual" counterpart of the immediate aesthete (EO-I 90). This corresponds precisely to the close connection between the Freudian ego and the id—and just as the ego is a conscious front of the id, the symbolism of Faust and Don Juan suggests that

522 Faust is the main character of an old legend which became popular in Europe. The story of Faust was popularised by the English playwright Christopher Marlowe in the beginning of 17th century, but it received its best-known adaptation in late 18th century by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Traditionally, Faust is a successful intellectual who is not satisfied with his life. The dissatisfaction leads him to a shrewd agreement with the Devil, where Faust accepts the exchange of his soul for unlimited knowledge and worldly pleasures. Kierkegaard developed his own version of the legend.

523 The story of Ahasverus can be traced back to 13th century Europe. According to the legend, he taunted Christ when he carried the cross on the way to his crucifixion at Golgotha and was subsequently cursed to walk the earth aimlessly forever, or until the second coming of Christ, cursed to live and never die. I will bring him up again in relation to Kierkegaard's conception of death in the last section of chapter four. In a journal entry from March 1836, included in *The Soul of Kierkegaard: Selections from His Journals*, ed. Alexander Dru (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), Kierkegaard indicates that Don Juan, Faust, and Ahasverus represent "life outside religion in its threefold direction" (50), which is probably a reference to the notion of the aesthetic sphere in its early development.

524 Johannes the Seducer is the author of "The Seducer's Diary" in *Either/Or* (EO-I, 301–445).

525 See §3.2.

the first self is such a front for immediacy.[526] This applies also to Johannes the Seducer and Mr. "A," who can be regarded as more comprehensive and sophisticated versions of aesthetes. Moreover, there is arguably a qualitative difference between Mr "A" and the rest of the reflective aesthetes, as I will explain.

The Seducer is a highly imaginative hedonist of a sort that does not invite much sympathy: he is shrewd in a manipulative manner, as well as systematically avoiding all commitments in order to keep his possibilities constantly open. However, his life-affirming stance can be viewed in a positive light, posing a challenge to an ethical and religious mode of living. The stance is, for example, captured in his Nietzschean claim that "under the esthetic sky, everything is buoyant, beautiful, transient," but "when ethics arrives on the scene, everything becomes harsh, angular, infinitely *langweiligt* [boring]" (EO-I 367). The Seducer's "yes" to life is also reflected in a comment of *Either/Or's* editor, Victor Emerita, that "his life has been an attempt to accomplish the task of living poetically" and that he has succeeded with help of his "sharply developed organ for discovering the interesting in life" (EO-I 304). This can be compared to passages in *Postscript*, where Climacus expresses his admiration for thinkers who "lead the richest human life" and who in addition to producing "works of art" turn themselves into "an existing work of art" (CUP-I 303).[527] The Seducer attempts to enhance life's meaning by transforming it into art, but his evasion of commitment and lack of self-criticism arguably affect his ability to properly shape himself. Nathanial Kramer suggests that the "combination of the sensuous and the sexual with the spiritual may describe a way to think of Johannes beyond merely aesthetic categories."[528] In this regard he refers to Sylvia Walsh's description of Don Juan as a "spiritual erotic figure," which is capable of illuminating the "sensuous character of religious life"—and applies it to the Seducer.[529] However, in light of my account both Kramer and Walsh are erroneous in their suggestions, because Don Juan is not spiritual as a personification of immediacy, while the Seducer is spiritual as a reflective aesthete, so that does not make him misplaced in aesthetic categories. This is the reason Don Juan is associated with anxiety but not despair, while the Seducer is prone to both.

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526 See §2.2.

527 Climacus is presumably referring to Socrates, whose mode of living is ethical, bordering the religious, according to Kierkegaard, but it is still relevant to bring this up in this context.

528 Nathaniel Kramer, "Johannes the Seducer: The Aesthete *par excellence* or on the Way to Ethics?" in *Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms* (vol. 17 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Katalin Tun and Jon Stewart (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 172.

529 Sylvia Walsh, "Don Juan and the Representation of Spiritual Sensuousness," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47, no. 4 (1979): 628.

Emerita wonders in his introduction whether the Seducer is an alias used by the mysterious Mr. "A," which can be interpreted as Kierkegaard's indication of such a relation between them (EO-I 8–9). If so, Mr "A" can be viewed as taking a critical stance on his former self. The readers get to know him indirectly through his writings, which contain "a multiplicity of approaches to an esthetic view of life" (EO-I 13), as well as through the letters of the Judge. His self-consciousness and perspective can be assumed to be more profound than applies to his past self and his characters, because he reflects on them critically and indicates their shortcomings. He seems to have cultivated an inner tension and a critical social awareness, which suggests that his deeper self-element has developed. Nevertheless, the horizon of meaning is thoroughly within aesthetic categories. Not only does he strive to turn his life into a work of art, but he also embraces the pleasures of immediacy, which is emblematic of the first self, as well as having the ultimate aesthetic purpose of happiness, instead of eternal blessedness. In other words, Mr. "A" can plausibly be viewed as being an aesthete, who has achieved a thick self, but where the first self-element has nevertheless ended up in a dominant position within the self-constitution. If this is correct, he would be a qualitatively different aesthete than the rest of the aesthetes I have mentioned. By surmounting the serious shortcomings of frivolous aesthetes—for instance by a sophisticated control of desires, as well as ability to engrave a character by decisions and resolve—he would qualify as an example of what I have referred to as a serious aesthete.

According to Ryan Kemp, *Either/Or* is a work that "showcases two competing life views: a life of aesthetic pleasure on the one hand, and a life of ethical commitment on the other hand"—and he argues that it should not be taken for granted that "Judge William presents the better case," as he accuses Anthony Rudd and John Davenport of doing.[530] I agree with Kemp in the sense that *Either/Or*, as well as Kierkegaard's framework of the existence-spheres, is not meant to represent a subjective system, according to which readers are directly or indirectly persuaded to prefer one existence sphere over another one—or handed a ladder to paradise. However, I am also critical of Kemp's position to make the case for Mr. "A" and his aestheticism against the Judge's ethical mode of living. A better approach might be to question the dichotomy between aesthetic pleasure and ethical commitment; neither by rejecting that there are mutually exclusive existence-spheres nor by claiming that they can

[530] Ryan Kemp, "'A' the Aesthete: Aestheticism and the Limits of Philosophy," in *Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms* (vol. 17 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Katalin Tun and Jon Stewart (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 1. See also Anthony Rudd, "Reason in Ethics Revisited: *Either/Or*, 'Criterionless Choice' and Narrative Unity," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2008): 178–99; and John J. Davenport, "The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice between the Aesthetic and the Ethical: A Response to MacIntyre," in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, ed. John J Davenport and Anthony Rudd (New York, NY: Open Court, 2001), 75–113.

be mediated to a higher unity, but rather by considering whether the presumptions made are true and whether improvements can be made within each existence-sphere.

For instance, the Judge maintains that an individual who lives aesthetically "develops with necessity, not in freedom," so that "no metamorphosis takes place in him, no infinite internal movement by which he comes to the point from which he becomes the person he becomes" (EO-II 225). This is related to a remark he makes in the next paragraph, where he maintains that aesthetic development is "just like that of a plant, and although the individual becomes, he becomes that which he immediately is" (EO-II 225). This is precisely in line with what I have stated about Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming, that in its relevant thick sense it does not refer to organic development of some sort, but to the rupture of what one immediately is when one's freedom is exercised to actualise possibilities and make ideals concrete. However, the Judge should be interrogated as to why aesthetes are necessarily prevented from engaging in such self-becoming. In fact, Mr. "A" should be able to become a thick self while staying within the aesthetic sphere, for example by devoting himself to his vocation, simply because it is a creative expression and a source of what he perceives as a meaningful joy. Moreover, the Judge compares the soul of an aesthete to a "soil out of which grow all sorts of herbs, all with equal claim to flourish," and that "his self consists of this multiplicity," so that "he has no self higher than this," before adding: "Now, if he has what you so often speak of—esthetic earnestness and a little common sense about life—he will perceive that it is impossible for everything to flourish equally" (EO-II 225). This corresponds to the value of one-sidedness that I have discussed, according to which one has to make preferences and choose between options.[531] Even so, the question must be asked of why the aesthetes cannot express such one-sidedness. The Judge is arguing that a coherent character cannot be engraved by aesthetes, but that is a strawman argument against an aesthetic mode of living. It is true that in order to achieve a thick self in its full inward and outward sense, one has to choose between options, show resolve, and take responsibility. It is also true that instincts need to be sublimated and desires constructively managed. However, there is no reason to presume that this cannot take place within the aesthetic self, so that the task of becoming can be an aesthetic quest, as well as an ethical or a religious one.

A good example of an aesthetic life-view where one actively takes a control of one's fate rather than being at the mercy of natural forces, can be found in the "Rotation of Crops" segment of *Either/Or*. I mentioned the segment in chapter two in relation to a sort of time-

[531] See §2.3.7.

consciousness that is frivolously aesthetic, but there is a potential to overcome any such faults in the rotation approach to life.[532] As Kemp points out, the approach is rooted in the problem that "pleasure depends on novelty" and that "novelty is a finite resource."[533] Moreover, the strategy of constantly "changing the soil" (EO-I 292), that is to say, to perpetually move around and travel places in search for something new and interesting, is tiresome, as well as being a limited and non-renewable source of novelty. What is renewable, however, is one's subjective perspective and imagination. So, instead of altering the soil, one can resourcefully "change the method of cultivation and the kinds of crops," as Mr. "A" puts it. (EO-I 292). What is essential to his mode of living is the artful practice of selectively remembering and forgetting events: "The more resourceful one can be in changing the method of cultivation, the better, but every particular change still falls under the universal rule of the relation between [*remembering*] and *forgetting*" (CUP-I 292).[534] He claims that "when an individual has perfected himself in the art of forgetting and the art of recollecting in this way, he is then able to play shuttlecock with all existence" (CUP-1 292). Various factors can negatively affect such a mode of living and one must operate within certain boundaries. For instance, he claims that hope should be "thrown overboard" in order to "live artistically," because hope is "an untrustworthy shipmaster" and one should attempt to limit vulnerabilities that are not under one's command (CUP-I 292–293). In this way, as Kemp stresses, actuality is used as a platform "for the rich and boundless world of inner experience"—and "a skilled aesthete reshapes his experience by forgetting aspects that are painful and uninteresting."[535] There are aspects of the account provided by Mr. "A" that can be problematic in relation to proper self-becoming: in addition to the time-consciousness, it is, for instance, stated that "arbitrariness is the whole secret" (EO-I 299). To a certain extent, arbitrariness can without doubt be artfully applied in a manner that does not prevent one from engraving a character—and even the arbitrariness itself can become the engraved characteristics of a person—but there still must be limits to how arbitrary one's actions and behaviour can be, if one is engaged in the task of shaping a character. However, it is easy to imagine that reflection on the rotation method—which Mr. "A" does engage in by writing about it, perhaps in addition to the Judge's advice, can lead the aesthete to improve his

532 See §2.3.6.

533 Kemp, "'A' the Aesthete: Aestheticism and the Limits of Philosophy," 5.

534 Howard and Edna Hong translate the word for "remembering" as "recollecting," which is to be avoided, as it can be misleading in the context of repetition, as will become clear in chapter four. Alastair Hannay, however, uses the word "remembering" in his translation; see Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (EO-H), ed. and trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 233.

535 Kemp, "'A' the Aesthete: Aestheticism and the Limits of Philosophy," 5. See also EO-I 294.

endeavour to turn himself into a work of art, so that the piece of art he becomes is definite and engraved. The theme of repetition is observable in such an aesthetic task of becoming, because to constantly rotate the crops, to play shuttlecock with existence by artful remembrance, can be regarded as a type of subjective repetition—and aesthetes of this sort become themselves through such repetition.

In context of the first and deeper self-elements, I contend that the ethical-religious dimension in people develops alongside the formation of their deeper self, which I have associated with the Freudian superego. Recall that the deeper self struggles with the first self and attempts to administer it.[536] The emergence of the deeper self is part of normal human growth—and part of Kierkegaard's thick concept of the self is the development of the deeper element. One's existence-sphere, however, depends on which element establishes its authority over the "shared mind" (EUD 317), that is to say, the whole self—the conscious agency. The deeper self has developed in a serious aesthete, although it has been kept in check.[537] In an ethical or religious person, however, the deeper self keeps the first self in check. Recall also that the deeper self undermines the first self's identification with the surrounding world and directs the focus inwards, so that the subjective distance from immediacy becomes wider, resulting in the advancement of one's self-consciousness and self-determining agency.

Kierkegaard's notion of the ethical sphere—which from the perspective of binary distinction would be the initial stage of an ethical-religious mode of living—is represented by Judge William, even though his delimitation of the ethical must be scrutinised in the way I have suggested. Azucena Sánchez expresses a common position when she describes the ethical sphere as being "characterized by the individual's relation to duty—enabled by deliberation, choice and resolve."[538] Regarding the duties in question, C. Stephen Evans is likely correct in associating them with the social morality of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*, where "to be ethical is to fulfil the social responsibilities assigned to one as a participant in various social institution, such as the family and the state, with the state as the highest of these institutions."[539] As Evans observes, the ethical life of the Judge corresponds to a large extent to such morality:

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536 See §2.2.1 on the first self and the deeper self; and §2.2.2 on the illuminating context of Freud's structural model.

537 The first self-element can override the deeper self-element in the same way as the ego can override the superego.

538 Azucena Palavicini Sánchez, "Ethics," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome III: Envy to Incognito* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 21.

539 C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 104. However, the *Sittlichkeit* conception of the ethical sphere is sometimes emphasised in order to deradicalise Kierkegaard's notion of the teleological suspension of the ethical, but that is a questionable interpretation. People whose mode of living is determined by e.g. the Hegelian *Moralität*, namely by rational moral principles akin to the deontological ethics of Kant, would presumably also belong to the ethical sphere—and the teleological suspension hardly excludes such a moral view.

it is centred upon "the fulfilment of social roles such as husband, wife, parent, citizen, conscientious worker, etc."[540] In other words, the Judge is primarily concerned with social norms and to be a good member of his community, as well as nurturing relationships with family and friends.[541] It is illuminating to put such an ethical mode of living in context to the Freudian superego, which I have compared to the deeper self. Nordentoft is correct in maintaining that the Judge's criticism of aestheticism can be compared to "what happens when the ego and the superego repress the libidinous id impulses."[542] Recall that the superego internalises the standards of authoritative figures, which usually reflect the standard of the community.[543] Recall also that the function of the superego of being one's conscience and judging behaviour, actively repressing the id and inhibiting the ego—which in Kierkegaard's lexicon means repression of the sensuousness of immediacy and inhibition of the reflective aestheticism of the first self.[544] Moreover, the tension between the ego and the superego creates anxiety and guilt in people, generating not only moral sense, but also potentially sublimating natural aggressiveness by turning it inwards, towards oneself, resulting in a state of mind that can be described as a religious mentality.[545]

In line with such mechanism of the superego, the tendency of the deeper self to eventually replace an ethical attitude with a religious one might be the reason the ethical sphere is only a transitional sphere in Kierkegaard's scheme of things. He seems to indicate such a mechanism in his account of the first self and the deeper self, for example by the tendency of the deeper self to divert the shared mind "away from the external," as well as planting the notion that a person is ultimately powerless in relation to the external, "capable of nothing at all" (EUD 317).[546] This can lead to more inwardness and, as Piper puts it in his account of the outcome of the struggle in question, "the self's resignation to the inconstancy of the external world."[547] Such inner development as the distinction between the ethical and the religious arguably receives support from a passage in *Postscript* where Climacus associates the ethical sphere with "action-victory" and the religious one with "suffering," as well as stressing that these two spheres "have an essential relation to each other" (CUP-1 294). The

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540 Ibid.

541 Accordingly, the type of love that characterises the ethical sphere is married love and friendship.

542 Nordentoft, *Kierkegaard's Psychology*, 40. See also David J. Gouwens, "Kierkegaard's Either/Or, Part One: Patterns of Interpretation", in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or, Part I*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 26.

543 See §2.2.2. See also Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 25.

544 See Lear, *Freud*, 220–221.

545 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 114. This can be associated with Nietzsche's concept of "ressentiment."

546 The shared mind is the self as a self-conscious agency, of which the self-elements are a part. See §2.2.

547 Piper, *Kierkegaard's Non-Dialectical Dialectic*, 510.

transition is therefore from a sense of power and control in the world to the suffering that is involved in resigning the external and the humility of accepting one's ultimate powerlessness in a transient temporality. An ethical mode of living can be described as a resignation of immediacy, but a religious resignation—or *infinite resignation*, as Johannes de Silentio often refers to it in *Fear and Trembling*—goes further and renounces temporal finitude, along with ethical self-sufficiency, in favour of the infinite and the eternal.[548] Such resignation is a source of suffering, which partly explains why Climacus identifies religiosity with suffering. The resignation can be put in context with the aggressiveness towards oneself, mentioned by Freud, so that the aggressiveness is intensified in the transition from an ethical life-view to a religious one. One crucial expression of such intensified self-aggressiveness is religious self-denial. Kierkegaard maintains that "in order to relate oneself to the essentially Christian," one must as a precondition become "sober in the sense of eternity" through self-denial—and he contrasts this stance to selfishness, the "intoxication of self-esteem," which includes "erotic love and friendship," as "the *I* intoxicated in the *other I*" (WL 56). Such selflessness, or self-sacrifice, is part of an infinite resignation—and it can be viewed as the ultimate expression of aggressiveness directed inwards.[549]

However, two points must be made in relation to the transition to the ethical sphere and the religious one. First, it should be noted that although the transition can be described in terms of such a psychological process, it can hardly be reduced to it—and Kierkegaard certainly seems to have held the personal belief that there was something miraculous in the depths of inwardness, corresponding to the New Testament verse in which Leo Tolstoy found the key to the Christian truth: "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you," a phrase that is often translated as "the kingdom of God is within you."[550] Secondly, it should be noted that according to the view that I am advancing, the moral restraint emerges as a part of a normal human development, so that people who lack such a dimension entirely

548 See e.g. FT 41–42. See also e.g. John Lippitt, *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016/2003), 50–52.

549 Recall the epigraph to this chapter where Žižek links Kierkegaard's notion of infinite resignation to the Freudian notion of *Versagung*, which Žižek interprets in terms of self-sacrifice. Selflessness and altruistic love are of course also part of the Christian faith, but they are notions that are common to the major world religions, at least their esoteric branches, which suggests that they are grounded in human development, apart from the particular religious traditions. The notion of infinite resignation can be regarded as universal in such a sense, as I will mention in relation to religiousness A. However, this is not meant to deny that Christianity and Christian love are in a way *sui generis*.

550 Luke 17:20. The former translation is from the English Standard Version (ESV), while the latter can e.g. be found in the New King James Version (NKJV). See also Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is Within You: Christianity Not as a Mystic Religion but as a New Theory of Life*, trans. Constance Garnett (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984/1894), 368.

must count as being underdeveloped, independent of existence-spheres.[551] This is in line with the view expressed by Climacus in *Postscript* that "ethics certainly ought to have a voice in every life-view" (CUP-I 346). He is referring to ethics in the broad sense, but such a sense includes moral concerns.

Kierkegaard's philosophy in relation to the religious sphere is such a large topic that I must restrict my discussion to what is most relevant for my task, as well as the basics. As I have mentioned, the sphere can be divided into religiousness A and B. Broadly speaking, the former refers to religious pathos in the sense of being a pathos for the eternal, which is used symbolically for what I have referred to as the psychical factors of infinitude, possibility and eternity—which from the other topographical perspective is represented by the deeper self-element. The pathos in question is independent from any particular religious tradition and it loosely corresponds to what nowadays is often referred to as spirituality. As Evans explains, it presupposes "only the natural concepts and emotions that are possible for human beings on the basis of their own reasons and experiences."[552] The infinite resignation, mentioned above, belongs to such a universal religious pathos. Religiousness B, however, signifies the Christian faith as it is conceived by Kierkegaard. In chapter one I briefly mentioned the key features of his conception of Christianity.[553] His understanding of the faith is marked by his subjective approach and concern with how to live: a subject-to-subject relation to God through inwardness, rather than a subject-object relation (CUP-I 199–200); the Christian faith as an "existence-communication," rather than as a perpetual search for the correct textual interpretation (CUP-I 380); and a contemporaneity with Christ as a "prototype" to imitate (PC 238), which implies striving and action rather than mere admiration (PC 241).[554] However, I will focus on an aspect that is related to all these features and which signifies the paramount subjective transformation of a religious mode of living according to Kierkegaard: the symbolical death and rebirth, which is connected to the significance of altruistic love, as I will explain.

In 1851, a book was published in Kierkegaard's own name where symbolic death and rebirth was explicitly discussed: *For Self-Examination*. Under the subheading "It Is the Spirit Who

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551 This is one of the aspects that distinguishes a frivolous aestheticism from a serious one. Moreover, if a religious person suspends the ethical on a religious ground, she must have an ethical side; otherwise, no suspension would be needed.

552 Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction*, 139.

553 See §1.3.

554 The meaning of imitation is not to become a God-man, but to relate to Christ on a personal level and to approach his spirit, the purity of his heart. *The Imitation of Christ*, a popular medieval book on Christian devotion, was read with appreciation by Kierkegaard. See a journal entry from 1849, JP VI 6524 (*Pap*. X² A 167), published as a supplement to PV (222). See also Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 183.

Gives Life," Kierkegaard states that there is "not one Christian qualification into which Christianity does not first of all introduce as the middle term: death, dying to [*at afdøe*]—in order to protect the essentially Christian from being taken in vain" (FSE 76). He also claims that to "enter into" such a symbolic death is the first instruction of Christianity's "life-giving Spirit" (FSE 76–77). The death in question means to extinguish "every merely earthly hope," and "every merely human confidence," so that you must "die to your selfishness, or to the world, because it is only through your selfishness that the world has power over you"—and he adds that "if you are dead to your selfishness, you are also dead to the world" (FSE 77).[555] Moreover, in a journal entry from the following year, published as a supplement to the Princeton edition of *Point of View*, Kierkegaard stresses what is essential to the proclamation of Christianity by listing three ideas: "imitation [of Christ], dying away to the world, being born again" (PV 289). The list is inconclusive, but it speaks volumes that these are the ideas that he brings up in this context.[556]

My contention is that the symbolic death is synonymous with the notion of infinite resignation, while the symbolic rebirth signifies a renewal in the selfless love of one's neighbour that is associated with the divine. If one takes the Christian truth to heart by an act of faith, one identifies with Christ and his love—and one's life is purified and restored through such love. Thus, the movement of infinite resignation represents only one side of the coin in a properly Christian mode of living, because such resignation is complemented by the movement of faith, where one receives oneself and the world back in a transformed condition. This turns the pathos of Christianity into a powerful motivating force.[557] The evidence for such a reading is on almost every page of *Works of Love*, where Kierkegaard accounts for

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555 Symbolic death and rebirth were essential to early Christianity and remained essential to at least an esoteric Christian tradition throughout the medieval period—the Christianity of monasteries, convents, orders, mystical schools, et cetera. *The Imitation of Christ* includes e.g. the following prescription: "Learn to die to the world so that you may live with Christ" (42). One influential Biblical source is John 3:6–7 (ESV), where Christ says: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" Another influential source is to be found in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans 6:1–14 (ESV): "How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. . . . "The Epistle to the Romans is not an obscure part of scripture in Kierkegaard's Lutheran tradition, but the 'chief part of the New Testament' and "truly the purest gospel," according to Martin Luther (*Lecture on Romans: Glosses and Scholia*, AE 35:365, 380).

556 The importance of the symbolic death and rebirth for Kierkegaard is evident from the exclamation that follows: "O my God, I am grateful—how clear you have made everything to me!" (PV 289).

557 Kierkegaard's focus on pathos (or passion) in relation to religion is mentioned by Wittgenstein in the context of the dryness of wisdom, including ethical wisdom: "Amongst other things Christianity says, I believe, that sound doctrines are all useless. That you have to change your *life*. (Or the *direction* of your life.) / That all wisdom is cold; & that you can no more use it for setting your life to rights, than you can forge iron when it is *cold*. / For a sound doctrine need not *seize* you; you can follow it, like a doctor's prescription. — But here you have to be seized & turned around by something. . . . / Wisdom is passionless. By contrast Kierkegaard calls faith a *passion*." Ludwig Wittgenstein (1998), *Culture and Value*, revised edition, ed. G. H. Von Wright (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing), 61e.

his conception of altruistic love (*Kjerlighed*).[558] Above, I mentioned that the self-denial of the movement of resignation is a precondition for relating oneself to the essentially Christian, but such self-denial is so intertwined with the love of the movement of faith that the two movements can potentially be simultaneous rather than taking place as a sequel. Kierkegaard explains the Christian commandment of loving one's neighbour as "self-denial's love" and adds that "self-denial simply drives out all preferential love just as it drives out all self-love" (WL 55). However, although self-denial can be regarded as natural to people in context of the mechanism of the deeper self, or the superego, selfless love is unnatural to human beings and according to the Christian outlook it cannot be properly mastered except through love of God and trust in him as the creator, as well as love's conversion into a religious duty (WL 24).[559] For the renewal, one must win God, as the following passage suggests:

> [S]omething wonderful happens, heaven's blessing on self-renunciation's love: in the mysterious understanding of blessedness everything becomes his, belongs to him who had no mine, who in self-renunciation made all of his yours. God is indeed everything, and precisely by having no mine at all self-renunciation's love wins God and wins everything. For he who loses his soul shall win it; but the distinction mine and yours or the mine and yours of friendship and erotic love are a preservation of the soul. Only spiritual love has the courage to will to have no mine at all, the courage to abolish completely the distinction between mine and yours, and therefore it wins God—by losing its soul. (WL-P 251)[560]

In this regard, Pattison correctly observes in his foreword to *Works of Love* that the role of Christian love "is not to deny the value of the love we experience when we fall in love but to provide a basis on which such love can truly flourish."[561] The same applies to friendship and other attachments that were resigned: they can be renewed through being filtered through God and his love, as a "middle term," so that every relationship is transformed into a "God-relationship" (WL 376). Indeed, one's own self is renewed in this way, so that the self that one has denied is restored. However, as Ferreira emphasises in her commentary, it is crucial not to misunderstand the role of the God-relationship: it is not a "self-centred narcissistic concern with God" or selfish preoccupation with one's 'personal' relation to God, one's individual salvation," as she explains.[562] As an example, she mentions that immediately after

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558 The modern Danish spelling is "*kærlighed*."

559 See 1 John 4:7–9 (ESV): "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only son into the world, so we might live through him."

560 Here I prefer the translation of the *Works of Love* edition that is edited by George Pattison (WL-P; New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2009) and the page number refers to that edition. In the *Works of Love* edition of the Princeton series, the passage is on p. 268. Both editions list Howard and Edna Hong as translators, but they are still significantly different.

561 George Pattison, Foreword to *Works of Love* (WL-P; New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2009), xii–xiii.

562 M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's Works of Love* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 247.

maintaining that the Christian should in everything relate himself to God, Kierkegaard contrasts such a notion with a private relationship with God (WL 381), where one withdraws inwardly. Rather, Ferreira duly draws attention to a passage where Kierkegaard states that people can fulfil their duties to God only by remaining "in the world and in the earthly circumstances assigned to [them]" (WL 377). She then concludes that Kierkegaard "is, in the end, appealing to Luther's stress on the demand on us that is announced by our station in life."[563] Once again, Kierkegaard is concerned with actions.

From the first-person perspective of Christians, this is the life of faith, but from an outside perspective of an observer, this can be viewed as a religious way to confront the fragility and vicissitudes of temporal existence: an art of living, comparable to the aesthete's rotation of crops. This aspect of a religious life is well captured by Jeffrey Hanson in relation to his interpretation of faith in *Fear and Trembling*, where he observes that "faith is a means of coping with the inevitable losses, heartbreaks, and difficulties presented by life and enables an appreciation of life as a gift without discounting the . . . sense in which life remains deeply objectionable on humanly constructed ethical and aesthetic terms."[564] The symbolic death and rebirth sheds light on what is being communicated in *Fear and Trembling* with regard to the double-movement of resignation and faith (FT 36 and 119), for which the Biblical Abraham—the knight of faith—serves as an exemplar. Abraham has mastered such an art of living. How thoroughly he resigns the world and how thoroughly he receives it back through faith is symbolised by the story of his son Isaac. God's command that Abraham sacrifices what is dearest for him, both during his lifetime and posthumously, is a metaphor for the symbolic death according to which one has to die to selfishness and every earthly hope. He makes the movement of infinite resignation by being ready to sacrifice his own finitude, but through faith he receives his finitude back in a transformed condition. Isaac is spared. Such double-movement mirrors the movements of infinitude and finitude according to which possibilities are actualised—and it can indeed be viewed as the absolute Christian movement of that sort, according to which the Christian ideal self is made concrete.[565] In the same way, the movements need to be repeated in patience to preserve the Christian mode of living. The theme of repetition is also evident in the renewal itself: selfhood shaped by immediacy has been sacrificed, but a new selfhood is received, which from the Christian perspective

563 Ibid., 247–248.

564 Jeffrey Hanson, *Kierkegaard and the Life of Faith* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 2.

565 In relation to such a view, it is notable that Kierkegaard states in *Works of Love* that love (*Kjerlighed*) is what "connects the temporal and eternity" (WL 6).

represents a new immediacy. In this manner, according to Kierkegaard, life and the world are affirmed in a religious mode of living. The uncertainty of the future is transcended through expectancy, in the sense I mentioned in relation to possibility in subsection 2.3.5, and the baggage of the past is transcended through repentance.

3.3.2 Transitions between forms of life

I have referred to the existence-spheres as broad categories of life-views, each with their own horizon of meaning. I have explained the existence-spheres in the context of the first self and the deeper self, but the question remains as to how such categories should be understood apart from the inner tension in which they are rooted. More precisely, in my account of the existence-spheres as a venue of becoming, the question must be raised as to what exactly it means to have a certain horizon of meaning. Furthermore, the related question must be asked as to how one should understand transitions between such horizons.

In chapter two I addressed how language acquisition triggers a qualitative leap (*Spring*) to a linguistic mode of living, in which the human spirit operates.[566] Recall that a qualitative change signifies a transition beyond any quantitative continuity. Gerhard Schreiber, in his account of the concept of the leap, points out that the Danish term *Spring* means to "burst forth," as when a source of water suddenly wells up.[567] Corresponding to such etymology, the leap connotes some new quality suddenly bursting forth.[568] Kierkegaard applies the concept to transitions between existence-spheres. In such a context, leaps are generated by a self-development that is determined by pathos.[569] Accordingly, Ferreira refers to leaps as pathos-filled "qualitative transitions."[570] In a note from the period in which Kierkegaard was writing *Concept of Anxiety*, he refers to the notion of the leap in *Fear and Trembling* and identifies "pathos" as "the substance of the leap" (CA 182–183).[571] In the same note he indicates that the leap is a category of freedom by distancing it from "immanence," which in his terminology signifies necessity or organic development. In a margin to the draft of

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566 See §2.1.1.

567 Gerhard Schreiber, "Leap," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome IV: Individual to Novel* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (Abingdon Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 71.

568 Gerhard Schreiber, "Leap," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome IV: Individual to Novel* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (Abingdon Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 71. See also e.g. CA 30: "The new quality appears with the first, with the leap, with the suddenness of the enigmatic." The contrast is "logical immanence" and the "logical movements of Hegel."

569 See discussion on pathos in §3.2. According to the view that I have been advancing, the pathos is in turn dependant on the struggle between the first self and the deeper self. See also the segment on interestedness in §2.3.4.

570 Ferreira, *Transforming Vision*, 46. See also Lippitt, *Humour and Irony*, 104–112.

571 JP III 2343 (*Pap.* V B 49:14) *n.d.*, 1844.

Stages he also comments that "systematicians are constrained to use existential categories such as the leap" (SWL 636),[572] which further suggests that the leap is a category of freedom in contrast to the system. This is in line with how the term is used in the published works, for instance in *Postscript* where Climacus describes the leap as "the category of decision" (CUP-I 99).

However, although the leap belongs to such a category as an expression of an existential pathos that cannot be reduced to a system, the leap does not signify the exercise of freedom in a normal sense, but rather, as I will explain, an acknowledgment and acceptance of a new state of affairs that one has already experienced as more valid than the old one. Moreover, Kierkegaardian leaps must be clearly distinguished from the common misconception of them as a "stab in the dark," based on mere willpower. Rather, as Ferreira is keen to point out, one's faculty of imagination plays a large role in preparing the ground for a leap, even though willpower may be needed for the final push.[573] The process in which leaps occur is inherently connected to imagination, not in the sense of imagining fantasies, but in the sense of viewing the coordinates of one's existence innovatively, of connecting the dots in a certain way.

Before I further demystify the notion of leaps as transitions between existence-spheres, I will shed more light on the existence-spheres as categories of life-views and modes of living. Stanley Cavell was the first major philosopher to associate such spheres with Wittgenstein's notion of a "form of life" (*Lebensform*), best known by section 19 of his *Investigations*, in which he states that "to imagine a language means to imagine a life-form."[574] Cavell articulates the point by commenting that "when a form of life can no longer be imagined its language can no longer be understood."[575] He elaborates by comparing metaphorical speech to a religious speech: to speak metaphorically "is a matter of speaking in certain ways using a definite form of language for some purpose," and to speak religiously "is not accomplished by using a given form, or set of forms, of words, and is not done for any further purpose: it is to speak from a particular perspective, as it were to mean anything you say in a special way." He then brings up the existence-spheres in the following context: "To understand a metaphor you must be able to interpret it; to understand an utterance religiously you have to

572 JP III 2344 (*Pap.* V B 150:21) *n.d.*, 1844.

573 Ferreira, *Transforming Vision*, 2-6 et al.

574 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001/1953), 7e (§19).

575 Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?—A Book of Essays*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 2002/1969), 159. The "form of life" interpretation of existence-spheres is also discussed by Charles L Creegan in *Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard: Religion, Individuality, and Philosophical Method* (London: Routledge, 1989); and by Genia Schönbaumsfeld in *A Confusion of the Spheres* (see in particular p. 43).

be able to share its perspective. . . . The religious is a Kierkegaardian Stage of life; and I suggest it should be thought of as a Wittgensteinian form of life."[576]

I will soon address the "particular perspective" mentioned by Cavell, but first it is necessary to introduce the general meaning of a form of life. In Wittgenstein's terminology, a life-form refers to the intertwining of language, culture, and worldview. Some commentators claim that there is only one human form of life in the Wittgensteinian sense, but Peter Hacker, who has analysed the concept thoroughly, convincingly refutes such interpretation. He argues, on the contrary, that "there is no uniquely human form of life, characteristic of the species—rather there are multiple human forms of life, characterized by different languages, and characteristic of different cultures and epochs."[577] Even though Wittgenstein's notion of a life-form is illuminating for Kierkegaard's existence-spheres it seems clear that Wittgenstein's focus on community with regard to forms of life does not entirely capture Kierkegaard's focus on personality types and self-development. The notion was unknown in Anglophone philosophy prior to Wittgenstein's use of it, but it has a long history in the German speaking world. In fact, historically speaking, it has variously been used to signify a cultural community or to signify personal character formation. The most prominent authors who use the term in the latter meaning, which is more in line with Kierkegaard's existence-spheres, are Friedrich Schleiermacher and Eduard Spranger, in particular the latter, whose popular book *Lebensformen* was published in Vienna shortly before the First World War. An English translation, *Types of Men*, was published in 1928. Spranger identifies six fundamental personality categories or "ideally basic types of individuality": the theoretic, the economic, the aesthetic, the social, the political, and the religious.[578] Two of these types roughly correspond to Kierkegaard's existence-spheres, the aesthetic and the religious, while the other would probably best collectively correspond to his ethical sphere. In both Wittgenstein's and Spranger's account of life-forms, there is no progressive transition between the types, in line with my contention regarding the Kierkegaardian counterpart.

The life-form notion points us in the right direction with regard to sufficiently understanding the existence-spheres. Crucial to a form of life is the context in which things acquire meaning, that is to say, the "particular perspective" referred to by Cavell. Both forms of life and existence-spheres can be compared to hermeneutical circles. Such circles signify the process of understanding a text hermeneutically: the grasp of the text as a whole is established by

576 Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say*, 159.

577 Peter Hacker, "Forms of Life," *Nordic Wittgenstein Review*, Special Issue (2015), 18.

578 See Eduard Spranger, *Types of Men*, trans. Paul J.W. Pigors (Halle (Saale): Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1928), 109-210.

reference to individual parts and the grasp of each individual part is established by reference to the whole. If the subject matter, namely the texts, are replaced by categories of life-views, the idea comes close to the meaning of the existence-spheres, each of which have a dominant drive and a grand perspective—a pattern, according to which everything else is viewed and understood.

To identify an existence-sphere as a form of life is to identify Kierkegaard's notion of the leap as a transition between two forms of life. In this respect, it is useful to take a look at Ferreira's suggestion of viewing the Kierkegaardian leap through the lens of Thomas Kuhn's description of shifts between paradigms in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, referring to an essential change in an approach or in basic assumptions.[579] In that work, Kuhn states that translating "a theory or worldview into one's language is not to make it one's own," because in order to do so, "one must go native, discover that one is thinking and working in, not simply translating out of, a language that was previously foreign."[580] However, as Kuhn explains, the transition in question is not "one that an individuals may make or refrain from making by deliberation and choice, however good [their] reasons for wishing to do so"—but rather, they discover "at some point in the process . . . that the transition has occurred, that [they have] slipped into the new language without a decision having been made."[581] This combines two important aspects of Kierkegaard's notion of the leap: on the one hand it is part of a "process" of subjective development, while at the same time being a sudden qualitative transition, a pathos-filled "slipping" of a sort. Individuals at some point find themselves in a situation where the hermeneutical circle of their worldview has transformed, so that the coordinates by which they understand the world and by which they struggle to endow their life with meaning, have been radically altered. Thus, although the leap is associated with the "category of decision" in *Postscript* (CUP-I 99), it is only a decision retrospectively and metaphorically: one does not decide to leap into a new sphere of existence one morning, but one can discover one morning that such a change has taken place. According to Kuhn, it is not even a sufficient factor to be convinced of an alternative perspective, because neither pure choice nor persuasion are sufficient grounds for the

579 Ferreira, *Transforming Vision*, 73–76.

580 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012/1962), 202–203. The concept of a paradigm is famously elusive and as Ian Hacking mentions in his introduction to Kuhn's work, "Margaret Masterman found twenty-one distinct ways in which Kuhn used the word paradigm" (xviii). In any case, his primary meaning by the term is a *scientific worldview*, that attracts "an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity" and which is "sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve" (11).

581 Ibid., 203.

transition in question, which he refers to as a "conversion experience."[582] How the conversion experience differs from mere persuasion is well captured by an example that Kuhn takes from the world of science: "many of those who first encountered, say, relativity or quantum mechanics in their middle years," find themselves "fully persuaded of the new view," while still being incapable of internalising it and being "at home in the world it helps to shape."[583] It is credible to view the Kierkegaardian leap in this light, so that the qualitative transitions between existence-spheres are regarded as a conversion, consisting in an internalisation of a form of life, which—in stark contrast to the decisions and resolve involved in shaping one's character—does not depend on choice and conviction, at least not solely, but rather on perceiving things in a new light.[584] However, neither Kuhn's conversion experience nor the Kierkegaardian leap should be completely separated from personal conviction. Kuhn mentions that "good reasons" supply motives for conversion and a climate in which it is more likely to occur."[585] Presumably, the same applies to the leap.

Moreover, Kuhn likens the conversion experience to a "gestalt switch" and states that "the transition between competing paradigms cannot be made a step at a time, forced by logic and neutral experience," in light of being a "transition between incommensurables," but that it must rather "occur all at once (though not necessarily in an instant) or not at all." [586] To deny that the transitions can be logically or neutrally forced, corresponds precisely to the repudiation that made Kierkegaard, via Haufniensis, invoke the notion of the qualitative leap in the first place, namely the rejection "of logical movements" in relation to the transitions in question (CA 30). Kuhn's claim that it must happen "all at once" is also in line with the "enigmatic suddenness" that Haufniensis attributes to the leap (CA 30).[587] The concept of gestalt switch, brought up by Kuhn, refers to a sudden change in perspective or perception and it is commonly associated with Wittgenstein's reference to Jastrow's "duck-rabbit," namely a picture that can both be a duck and a rabbit, depending on how one sees it.[588] An observer might only see a duck, but when her attention is drawn to certain features in a

582 Ibid.

583 Ibid.

584 See §2.3.7 for the discussion on character-shaping.

585 Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 203.

586 Ibid., 148.

587 To bring up the instant in this context is reminiscent of the Dane, although he might have been inclined to suggest a stronger connection. See §2.3.6 for discussion on the synthetic instant.

588 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 166e (part II, §xi). The term "gestalt switch" has unfortunately been turned into a cliché and the same applies to Kuhn's term "paradigm shift," which he abandoned later in life for this reason. It is important to note that I'm not claiming that transitions between existence-sphere are exactly like a gestalt switch, but rather than such comparison is helpful to understand one shifts between different horizons of meaning by perceiving different coordinates or connecting them in a different way.

certain context, the picture of a rabbit dawns on her. Similarly, nothing in the outside world changes in a leap between existence-spheres. Rather, the change consists in our focus on the features and the context in which we perceive those features. Such a gestalt switch is often referred to as Wittgenstein's concept of aspect-dawning—and it can serve as an analogy of the Kierkegaardian leap. Stephen Mulhall's *On Being in the World* is a noteworthy account of aspect-perception in the works of Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Mulhall demonstrates that Wittgenstein's discussion of such perception is meant to illuminate much more than a strange type of visual experience. Aspect perception highlights a much more general attribute of human reality, namely how human beings perceive their very existence and how they view the world they inhabit.[589] In the grand context of life-views, the qualitative transition to a new existence-sphere—or the dawning of new form of life—can be regarded as such an aspect-dawning.

3.3.3 Non-teleological categories

In chapter one I introduced Anthony Rudd's NEST theory, part of which is the normative teleology that he claims to be inherent in Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming. With regard to selfhood, Rudd attributes to Kierkegaard the teleological position that the central aim is to achieve meaning and coherence—and he considers the transition from an aesthetic mode of living to an ethical one to be the landmark progress in such an endeavour. Rudd claims that Kierkegaard adheres to a position, where the human self can only "hold itself together" when it is first and foremost "aimed" at a single *telos* of the eternal Good, understood in a Platonic sense.[590] Moreover, he ascribes to Kierkegaard a standpoint according to which the existence-spheres are a venue for progress towards such a *telos*. In a response to Alastair MacIntyre's interpretation in *After Virtue* that Kierkegaard presents a criterionless choice between the aesthetic sphere and the ethical one,[591] Rudd argues that there is no such radical choice, because "Kierkegaard's dialectic of the stages of life" is capable of leading aesthetes to the ethical through a rational justification, as well as leading them to a tradition that is ethical.[592] Rudd's perspective becomes particularly clear when he returns to the topic in a later paper, where he mentions an "important concession MacIntyre

589 Stephen Mulhall, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (London: Routledge, 1990).

590 Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 45. See also §1.3.

591 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 39–50. His notion of a radical choice refers to a criterionless choice: "a type of choice for which no rational justification can be given" (39). He argues that "the choice between the ethical and the aesthetic is not the choice between good and evil," but rather "the choice whether or not to choose in terms of good and evil" (40).

592 Rudd, "Reason in Ethics: MacIntyre and Kierkegaard," 131–132. Rudd had earlier argued for such a view in *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) where he attributes neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics to Judge William and claims that he provides good reasons why the aesthete should adopt an ethical mode of living.

has made to his critics," namely "to recognize that Kierkegaard does think of human nature as having a *telos*." Rudd then continues as follows: "But if there is such a *telos*, then it becomes possible to argue that a certain way of life may be one that frustrates the realization of that *telos* and, therefore, that it is rational to abandon that way of life since, although it may offer short term pleasures, it cannot offer long-term satisfaction."[593] With such a picture in mind, Rudd claims that Kierkegaard is leading his readers to a desirable mode of living, so that the existence-spheres become a ladder to the ideal.

However, MacIntyre's "concession" is much more nuanced than Rudd indicates. MacIntyre begins by stating that he cannot find in Kierkegaard's writings the "teleological view" that Rudd ascribes to the Dane, namely "that it is a central goal of human existence to find meaning and coherence in our lives."[594] He then continues by admitting that Kierkegaard "did of course recognize that human beings find a lack of coherence and meaning in their lives disquieting," but "it is not meaning *as such* nor coherence *as such* that we have to achieve, if we are to become what we are capable of becoming as ethical subjects, but that very specific type of meaning and coherence which belongs to the lives of those to whom it is given to stand before God and to acknowledge that they are in the wrong."[595] However, MacIntyre does not consider such an admission to contradict his thesis on radical choice. After acknowledging in the same piece that "there are good reasons for individuals to move from the aesthetic to the ethical,"[596] he rejects that such a view is inconsistent with his thesis, which he articulates at this point by stating that "to be in the aesthetic stage is to have attitudes and beliefs that disable one from evaluating and appreciating those reasons," so that individuals must already have chosen themselves as ethical subjects in order to be susceptible to such reasons.[597] This position is in line with viewing the existence-spheres as forms of life with their own horizon of meaning, although the choice in question should be understood in the qualified sense that I have explained. I consider MacIntyre to be defending a better position in this debate, but in my view, he can make a much stronger case against Rudd's reading of Kierkegaard.

593 Rudd, "Reason in Ethics Revisited," 181.

594 Alastair MacIntyre, "Once More on Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, ed. John J Davenport and Anthony Rudd (New York, NY: Open Court, 2001), 344.

595 Ibid.

596 He regards such reasons to be objectively valid, not just "good-reason-from-the-standpoint-of the-ethical" (ibid.)

597 MacIntyre, "Once More on Kierkegaard," 344.

First, earlier in this chapter I have questioned an interpretation of the aesthetic sphere where it is assumed that Judge William is correct in his framing of the aesthetic mode of living.[598] He should not be regarded as Kierkegaard's mouthpiece in every way—and his criticism should be taken with a grain of salt and understood in the dialectical context of the work. As I have argued, aesthetes can live a meaningful life and they do not necessarily lack coherence in applying their will or in their character. Good reasons in that regard for ethical or religious modes of living do not therefore necessarily appeal to the aesthetic pathos. Furthermore, John Lippitt is correct in criticising the extent to which Rudd values coherence or unity of character: it can involve excessive anticipation and pre-planning that risks "oversimplifying what a human life is like," in a way that Kierkegaard would have been likely to oppose, as I will address in relation to narrativism in chapter four.[599] One needs enough one-sidedness to engrave a character, but if personal coherence would have been of fundamental importance to Kierkegaard he would have discussed it more.[600] The self-advancement that I accounted for in chapter two—such as cultivation of self-consciousness and freedom, as well as an actualisation of possibilities and an engravement of character—can all take place within the compound of the aesthetic sphere.[601] The ideal self that one strives to make concrete in the process of becoming can consist of the aestheticism of Baudelaire as much as it can consist of the moralism of Habermas and the religiosity of Porète.

Secondly, purpose is surely important to most people, but as I have argued, purpose depends on one's existence-sphere—a purpose makes sense within the context of a form of life—and aesthetes can enrich their lives with all sorts of worthwhile purposes, as well as having the ultimate *telos* of enjoyment or happiness.[602] However, within the context of their sphere, aesthetes cannot properly perceive the context in which the *telos* of eternal blessedness can galvanise one's pathos, so they will have to leap into an ethical-religious form of life in order to perceive its value. The same applies, at least to some extent, to other aspects of different forms of life, such as the significance of social norms and marriage for an ethical mode of living or the significance of a trust in God and selfless love for a religious life-form. Good reasons can be provided for such notions, but the aesthete is as likely to be convinced by

598 See §3.3.1.

599 John Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight: Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Some Problems with Narrative," *Inquiry* 50:1 (2007): 40. See §4.1.2.

600 See § 2.3.7. As I mentioned in chapter one, Rudd relies excessively on part two of *Either/Or*.

601 See §§2.3.3–2.3.7.

602 See §1.2.1 and §3.2.

them as individuals belonging to the ethical or the religious sphere are prone to be persuaded by a preference for erotic love or the art of remembering and forgetting.

Thirdly, Rudd turns the framework of the existence spheres, as well as Kierkegaard's whole philosophy of selfhood, into a subjective system—and Kierkegaard's works are turned into manuals on how to make progress within the system, towards a *telos*. This is a perspective that I have resisted throughout the thesis. The perspective can either be of the kind where self-becoming is an immanent or organic development—akin to a seed that becomes a plant—or it can allow for the qualitative rupture of a second nature and an application of freedom, yet systematise such leaps within a teleological framework, so that an enhanced version of the plant analogy can still be regarded as pertinent. To view the existence-spheres as stations in a progress towards an ideal is a common interpretation, in which they are often depicted as representing stages in the ascent of consciousness.[603] As I have made clear, I do accept that there is such an advancement inherent in the Kierkegaardian task of becoming,[604] but I am critical of linking such advancement to the framework of the existence-spheres, so that Kierkegaard is viewed as leading his readers up an ascending scale from the aesthetic sphere to a religious ideal in a developmental scheme with a universally valid end-goal. In relation to my account of Kierkegaard's vocation and creative impulse in chapter one, I supported my position by invoking the criticism of Harvie Ferguson and David Kangas on viewing the existence-spheres as a developmental scheme.[605] They point out, each in their own way, that such a view turns Kierkegaard into an advocate of a subjective system, where progress is made that is comparable in structure to Hegelian mediation and sublation, where a lower quality is preserved in a higher one, in a relativised form. Rudd's interpretation is a Platonic variant of such a scheme—and it is antithetical to Kierkegaard as a philosopher of repetition.[606] His Platonic interpretation is even more farfetched than the Hegelian one, as there simply is no evidence that he operated within a Platonic framework or a scheme that can be compared to it. Lippitt, in his book review on Rudd's *Self, Value, and Narrative*, introduces the Platonic aspect by ironically stating that "intriguingly but controversially,"

603 See e.g. Lydia Amir, "Stages," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome VI: Salvation to Writing Enthusiasm* (vol. 15 in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*), eds. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 90.

604 See e.g. §§2.3.4–2.3.5. The advancement is poetically expressed by Anti-Climacus in *Sickness*: "Every human being is a psychical-physical synthesis intended to be spirit; this is the building, but he prefers to live in the basement, that is, in sensate categories. Moreover, he not only prefers to live in the basement—no, he loves it so much that he is indignant if anyone suggests that he move to the superb upper floor that stands vacant and at his disposal, for he is, after all, living in his own house" (SUD 43).

605 See §1.3. Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, 114. Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 7.

606 See §1.3 and §4.1.

the Dane "emerges as the richest modern proponent of a broadly Platonist view of the self, in which 'the elements that constitute the self can only be held together in a properly creative tension if the self as a whole is orientated to an objective (Platonic) Good.'"[607] Later in the review, Lippitt correctly points out that "there do seem to be crucial differences between Platonic commitment to the Good and the radicality of dependency upon God that is central to so many of Kierkegaard's discourses."[608] This is relevant because Rudd *de facto* replaces the Christian God-concept with the Platonic Good-concept.[609]

A major justification for the interpretation that I follow Ferguson and Kangas in targeting is the *Point of View* autobiographical narrative of 1848, which I thoroughly undermined in chapter one.[610] It is also not uncommon to defend a teleological view of the existence-spheres in the manner Merold Westphal does in his argument for interpreting them as a framework for structural sublation. Regarding the transition between the aesthetic sphere and the ethical one he summarises his view by stating that this structure is to be found in "Judge William's argument for 'the aesthetic validity of marriage,' in which the values of the aesthetic stage are not 'repudiated,' 'annihilated,' or 'destroyed' in the ethical institution of marriage, but rather 'ennobled' and 'transfigured.'"[611] Westphal then continues by referring to a passage in *Either/Or* where the Judge maintains that choosing the ethical does not mean the exclusion of aesthetic qualities, for although the aesthetic is "absolutely excluded" it "returns in its relativity" (EO-II 177). Likewise, regarding the transition between the ethical sphere and the religious one, he identifies such a structural sublation in Johannes de Silentio's account of the religious suspension of the ethical in *Fear and Trembling*. In *Becoming a Self*, Westphal, explicitly states that "a teleological suspension is nothing but a Hegelian *Aufhebung*, in this case the relativizing of the ethical by recontextualizing it within the religious as its higher principle."[612] The picture he depicts of the existence-spheres corresponds to his conception of Hegelian sublation, which he articulates as follows: X is "teleologically suspended in Y" when the "self-sufficient form of X is cancelled and whatever belongs to that mode of its being is relativized as something insufficient by itself," which has "positive significance,"

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607 John Lippitt, "Book Review: *Self, Value and Narrative*" (published together with a book review on *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Morality* by John J. Davenport), *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 32, no. 2 (2015): 224.

608 Ibid., 228.

609 I'll address the role of God in Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming in §3.3.4 on the abyssal ground of freedom, which is the last subsection of this chapter.

610 See §1.2.2.

611 Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Religiousness C: A Defence," 546. With regard to the references he makes in the passage, he cites pages of EO-II in the following order: 61, 31, 57, 271, 253, 21, 61, 30, 57, 31, 56, 94, 253, 271.

612 Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, 26.

because "the claim is that Y is the truth, or *telos* of X, and that in this process X realizes itself, or at least moves to a higher level of its normative development."[613] Thus, the process is interpreted as a self-actualisation, where individuals strive to actualise the truth of their being in a religious ideal. In responding to critics, such as Henry Piper, Westphal has stressed that while the Judge appears to be fully Hegelian, structurally and substantially, Silentio is merely a structural Hegelian, for the suspension of the ethical is substantially anti-Hegelian, for the Hegelian absolute is the ethical that is teleologically suspended.[614] In any case, such structural Hegelianism is sufficient to turn the existence-sphere into a subjective system of a sort that I have argued Kierkegaard opposed. Piper challenges Westphal's theory of the existence-spheres by offering an alternative picture of what takes place in the venue of the existence-spheres, a version of the tension between the first self and the deeper self that I offered earlier in this section.[615] He refers to such inner struggle as a "non-dialectical" type of a dialectic, namely "not the logical dialectic of *mediation* but an existential dialectic of *difference*—of irremediable paradox."[616] I have neither invoked Kierkegaard's concept of the paradox nor used the term "difference," but in my account of the existence-spheres I have implicitly suggested a pluralistic conception of Kierkegaard's process of becoming, so that different forms of life can be viewed as valid manifestations of subjectivity, each of which can be a venue for a constructive process of becoming. Leaps between existence-spheres—which I have described in terms of pathos-filled transitions and aspect-dawning—can always take place, potentially by help of Kierkegaard's compelling religious literature, but they open up a new horizon of meaning rather than signifying a teleological progress.

As Michael Weston keenly observes, "metaphysics in construing life as having an immanent goal fails to recognize that the wholeness of life from the point of view of the *living*"—"the *existing* individual"—"cannot be so conceived."[617] Kierkegaard's philosophy of subjectivity resists any such teleological systemisation. The question of how subjective existence should be understood in Kierkegaard's scheme of things, is answered by Weston by reference to the topic of this chapter: "as becoming." He explains his view as follows:

> Whereas objectively life is regarded as if it were in the past, completed and so surveyable by the contemplative gaze of the philosopher, subjectively life is not completable, since

613 Ibid., 146. See discussion of Hegelian sublation in §1.3.

614 Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Religiousness C: A Defence," 546–547. In a footnote, Westphal points out that "each of the three Problems in *Fear and Trembling* begins with the claim that Hegel can be right only if Abraham is a murderer rather than the father of the faithful" (547 n47).

615 See § 3.3.1.

616 Piper, "Kierkegaard's Non-Dialectical Dialectic," 499.

617 Weston, *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy*, 29.

> one is not done with it until it is done with one. From the existing individual's viewpoint, her own life appears as "constantly in process of becoming," without an achievable or ideal end. To live, therefore, consistently in terms of this subjective view, "it is essential that every trace of an objective issue should be eliminated" and so all trace of living as if such goals could give significance to one's existence as a whole.[618]

Thus, Weston, in a decisive manner, contrasts teleological systematisation to the process of becoming that characterises subjectivity. This is in line with the conception of becoming that I have been advancing in this chapter, as well as the whole thesis. The view is repeatedly indicated by Kierkegaard or his pseudonyms by invoking existential categories like freedom, decision, or uncertainty, such as when it is stated in *Postscript* that "the perpetual process of becoming is the uncertainty of earthly life, in which everything is uncertain" (CUP-I 86).[619] Both the aesthetic master and the knight of faith constructively respond to such fundamental uncertainty of human existence, each within their own form of life, but there is no system of existence to be discovered that can replace the anxiety of confronting the possibilities of selfhood and in shaping oneself through decisions and resolve. Kierkegaard associates a life-view with an "unshakable certainty" (EPW 76), as I mentioned in chapter one, but to strive towards such certainty is a very private, subjective and unsystematic task. In commenting on *Either/Or* in *Postscript*, Climacus expresses the point well: "That there is no conclusion and no final decision is an indirect expression for truth as inwardness and in this way perhaps a polemic against truth as knowledge" (CUP-I 252). He then continues by mentioning the last sentence of *Either/Or*, "only the truth that *builds up* is truth *for you*," of which he says: "This is an essential predicate in relation to truth as inwardness, whereby its decisive qualification as upbuilding *for you*, that is, for the subject, is its essential difference from all objective knowledge, inasmuch as the subjectivity itself becomes the sign of truth" (CUP-I 253). It is in such a context that one can understand Nordentoft's claim that the goal of the process of becoming "is nothing other than the process itself," for "the self is neither a fixed point of departure nor a fixed goal."[620] The process of becoming is so fundamental to Kierkegaard's concept of the self, according to her, that she considers "the precondition for acquiring the self" to be "identical with the self," for "the self is becoming."[621]

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618 Ibid., 30. Weston cites the translation of *Postscript* by Swenson and Lawrie (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1968): 79 and 115. In the Princeton edition, the corresponding pages are: 86 and 129. It must be noted in this context that neither the Judge nor Silentio are the most reliable of pseudonyms in the context of dissecting Kierkegaard's own views.

619 See e.g. also CUP-I 252: "That there is no conclusion and no final decision is an indirect expression for truth as inwardness and in this way perhaps a polemic against truth as knowledge."

620 Nordentoft, *Kierkegaard's Psychology*, 105.

621 Ibid.

3.3.4 The abyssal ground of freedom

The interpretation I am offering of Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming is different from a common construction of his philosophy of becoming that is, for instance, expressed as follows by Clare Carlisle: "The task of becoming a Christian is the problem and the purpose of Kierkegaard's whole authorship, and the 'becoming' in question here is not incidental or external to its 'task' of Christianity, but rather essential to it."[622] There is without doubt much ground in Kierkegaard's works to support such a perspective, beyond the unreliable *Point of View* writings. In this respect, it is telling that even Weston—despite his observations regarding the open-endedness of the process of becoming—nevertheless states that Kierkegaard does think that life has a *telos*, because those who engage in the process are "directed towards the end bestowed by God," namely eternal blessedness, for the process "requires a relation to God."[623] In contrast, I have underpinned a more pluralistic perspective, according to which such *telos* depends on a certain form of life.[624] Moreover, I have mentioned that Kierkegaard's philosophy must be distinguished from his personal conviction, which became increasingly Christian in the latter half of his career as an author.

However, more needs to be said to explain the elephant in the room that I have until now largely ignored: how the God-relationship appears to permeate Kierkegaard's outlook in relation to the task of becoming a self. A key point in this regard is an aspect of the account of the self in *Sickness* that I consciously left out of the picture in chapter two, but which I will now address. After presenting the relational view of the self,[625] Anti-Climacus states that "in relating itself to itself," the self "relates itself to another"—and that the self is unable "to arrive at or to be in equilibrium and rest by itself," except "by relating itself to that which has established the entire relation" (SUD 13–14). He then concludes the segment by maintaining that "the formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it" (SUD 14). The most natural interpretation of the power in which the self is grounded—or the *other* to which the self relates—is God, as the creator of the world and humanity according to Christian cosmology.[626] Much in *Sickness* supports such

622 Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 9.

623 Weston, *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy*, 32.

624 See §3.2.

625 See §2.3.

626 See e.g. John D. Glenn, Jr., "The Definition of the Self and the Structure of Kierkegaard's Work," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Vol. 19: The Sickness unto Death*, ed. Robert L Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 15; David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 70; Jamie Turnbull, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Philosophical Anthropology," in *A Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Jon Stewart (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2015), 478.

interpretation, for example when Anti-Climacus equates an eternal consciousness of being a self with gaining "the impression that there is a God" and that one's self "exists before this God" (SUD 27), or when he states that "the fatalist is in despair, has lost God and thus his self, for he who does not have a God does not have a self, either" (SUD 40).

These passages have been influential in inspiring a teleological reading of the notion of self-becoming, including Rudd's construction, although he clumsily secularises the God-concept by structurally identifying it as the Platonic Good.[627] Moreover, for Rudd, "the other" as the ground of the "equilibrium" of selfhood becomes "something else," as he explains: "my *telos* (goal)," in the rich or thick sense, "is the 'something else' which I need to relate to. . . . The self is only able to hold its opposite elements together if it is directed as a whole towards something else."[628] Rudd then refers approvingly to Hubert Dreyfus, who understands this aspect of *Sickness* in terms of an unconditional "defining commitment," through which one establishes one's identity and achieves selfhood.[629] The commitment in question has to do with the choice and resolve of character-building that I discussed in last chapter—and it is expressed with pathos by Kierkegaard himself in a journal entry from 1835 when he says that "the crucial thing is to find a truth that is truth *for me*, to find *the idea for which I am willing to live and die* (EO-II 361).[630] Such interpretation of the God-relationship is echoed by Davenport, who states that "to exist 'before God' means to live in a volitional commitment that is unreserved, standing for something as defining one's whole identity, being willing to submit this identity to eternal judgement, which finalizes us eternally as the self we have become in life."[631] There is a grain of truth in this, as I will address in relation to the finality of death in chapter four, but it is farfetched, to put it mildly, to understand the significance of the God-relationship for selfhood in terms of a defining pledge to something external, which is the meaning Dreyfus attributes to the unconditional commitment in question: "Any such unconditional commitment to some specific individual, cause, or vocation, whereby a person gets an identity and a sense of reality, would do to make the point that Kierkegaard wants to make."[632] Rudd is not willing to go so far, but his qualification is only that "one can only develop a coherent identity and thus lead a meaningful life, if one has commitments to 'ground projects' or 'final ends'—things that one cares about for their own

627 Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 44–45.
628 Ibid. 44.
629 Dreyfus, "Kierkegaard on the Self," 16. See also Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 44.
630 JP V 5100 (*Pap.* I A 75) August 1, 1835.
631 Davenport, "Selfhood and 'Spirit,'" 245.
632 Dreyfus, "Kierkegaard on the Self," 16.

sakes, and not just as means to anything else."[633] In my view, no good reason has been provided for any such interpretation of the relevant passages in *Sickness*.

A different attempt to find a secular philosophical meaning to an outwardly theological point is conducted by C. Stephen Evans, who comments on the *other* that establishes the relational self by a comparison to a thinker that I have invoked in a different context in chapter two: "Although Kierkegaard wrote these words a half-century before Freud, his view here is consistent with one of the major insights of Freud and such followers of Freud as the Object Relations Theorists."[634] The point, in short, is that it is always in relation to others that our identity is established and developed.[635] Evans admits that there is a sense in which the *other* is a reference to God, but he maintains that Kierkegaard deliberately uses the neutral term "power" in the sentence—"the self rests transparently in the power that established it" (SUD 14)—in order to signify a psychological sense in addition to a theological one.[636] Evans is correct in observing that in spite of being "a strongly Christian pseudonym," Anti-Climacus indicates that the relevant segment of *Sickness* is meant to have significance beyond a theological context.[637] However, his psychological interpretation is, in my view, equally farfetched as the one proposed by Dreyfus, Davenport, and Rudd. The text simply does not support such a construction.

Pattison, however, is on the right track in his reading of *Sickness*. He emphasises that to view one's life as "an existence 'before God' is to endow it with an almost unimaginable value in its quite unique individuality, prior to and apart from any action by which [one] theoretically or practically [determines oneself] as this or that."[638] He then pointedly adds: "I am no longer (vs. Sartre and the whole tradition of defining identity in terms of reflection) the sum of my actions, I am whoever God sees me as."[639] Pattison also stresses the subjectivity associated with Kierkegaard's God-concept: "God is not a matter of objective truth."[640] Anti-Climacus is neither referring to a commitment in relation to character-formation nor an identity forged

633 Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 44–45.

634 Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction*, 48.

635 Rasmus Rosenberg Larsen expresses a similar view in "The Posited Self: The Non-Theistic Foundation in Kierkegaard's Writings," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2015): "Kierkegaard wants to emphasize that human selfhood can never be fulfilled as self-understanding unless one accepts that one is always already in some experience of dependency to something exterior to oneself" (36).

636 Ibid., 49.

637 Ibid. See SUD 79. This is in line with our position in chapter two of attributing the view of the self in that part of the work to the philosophy of Kierkegaard.

638 George Pattison, "'Before God' as a Regulative Concept," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (1997): 84.

639 Ibid.

640 Ibid.

in relation to other people or some externalities, but to how inwardness should relate to the subjective ground of its being. Recall that the core sense individuals have of themselves has to do with their inwardness, not their character.[641] Recall also that people's self-determining agency—their freedom—is central to their inwardness and in constituting and upholding the relations of selfhood.[642]

However, this raises the question of what the ground of one's being is, the nature of this "power" in which one should transparently rest. It is God, broadly speaking, but there is a reason why Anti-Climacus does not invoke the "God" term in such key places. The appropriate context in this regard is not to be found in Freudian psychology, but rather in Schelling, whose lectures Kierkegaard attended in 1841–1842. Kierkegaard studied his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* and its subject matter invites comparison to the aspect of Kierkegaard's thought that I am considering.[643] Žižek articulates well the relevant ideas in his essay "The Abyss of Freedom": The God-concept of Schelling is split in two, on the one hand "Existence," namely "the fully actual God," and on the other hand "Ground of Existence," namely "the blind striving that lacks actuality."[644] The former is God as "Substance" while the latter is God as "Subject," and "Substance implies Subject as its constitutive openness, gap."[645] This subjective openness of God—the Ground of Existence, also referred to as the dark ground or the abyssal ground—signifies freedom. I do not claim that Kierkegaard adhered to Schelling's God-concept, the distinction inherent in it or its metaphysical underpinnings. But I think it more than plausible that the power in which one should ground oneself, consists in the power of freedom and possibility, which, after all, is the advancing spirit in a human being. In relation to *Concept of Anxiety*, Vincent McCarthy has connected the dots in a similar way: Schelling's idea of "the ground of freedom" is, according to him, "implicit in Kierkegaard's thought."[646] He points out that Schelling contrasts his category of freedom to "the category of necessity in the Hegelian system" and emphasises "God in process, a living God who realizes and manifests himself in freely creating and redeeming a world."[647] McCarthy also draws attention to what

641 See §2.3, in particular §2.3.7.

642 See §2.3, in particular §2.3.5.

643 F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006).

644 Slavoj Žižek, "The Abyss of Freedom," in *The Abyss of Freedom / Ages of the World* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press), 7.

645 Ibid.

646 Vincent A. McCarthy, "Schelling and Kierkegaard on Freedom and Fall," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary, Vol. 8: The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. Robert L Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 108.

647 Ibid., 94.

Schelling covered in the lectures that the Dane attended, such as the doctrine that "attempts to explain how *all* freedom—including divine freedom—moves from the nothingness of possibility into actuality.[648] Schelling's dark ground "is the source of the exercise of freedom," as McCarthy explains, and "freedom acts upon possibility and makes 'something' out of what was 'nothing.'"[649] In this context, McCarthy maintains that "Kierkegaard's work gives a new name to Schelling's dark ground, namely 'nothing,' and, more important, names its first product: anxiety."[650] An aspect of God is thus nothingness—the ultimate void of existence, the abyssal ground of freedom—signifying the possible. This does not contradict the notion that possibilities emerge through the faculty of imagination, which I discussed in chapter two,[651] but it supplements it with a cosmological perspective, according to which individual can ground themselves in in the "cosmic freedom," from which everything is derived. I use the troublesome term "cosmic freedom" in order to allow both a religious and a secular interpretation. Kangas refers to it as a "divine ground" and he describes it as follows:

> Schelling links the possibility of freedom in the radical sense as self-positing to that in God which is not God: not to God as absolute existence, but to God as the (abyssal) ground of existence. . . . The ground is an eternal about-to-be, an eternal beginning that remains at its beginning. Schelling also characterises the ground as a groundless, eternal, self-affirming will—but a 'will in which there is no understanding, and which therefore is not autonomous and perfect will. The divine ground, then, is an indeterminate potential to be, that which is presupposed in every act of existence—whether human or divine.[652]

Although such a ground can be regarded as divine from a religious point of view, it also lends itself to a secular understanding, according to which it represents the contingency of the cosmic order. What is being emphasised by Schelling is divine freedom in contrast to divine necessity, but it can also be understood as the contrast between natural contingency and natural necessity. To highlight cosmic freedom or contingency in this way, provides a context in which the notion of human freedom is facilitated, undermining any metaphysical perspective that reduces freedom to fate.

This outlook is uniquely suitable for linking my concept of self-becoming to the claims made by Anti-Climacus regarding the power in which the self should transparently rest. The power

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[648] Ibid., 95.
[649] Ibid., 108.
[650] Ibid.
[651] See §2.3.3 and §2.3.5.
[652] Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 100–101.

refers to the abyssal ground of freedom, the source of the possible across the existence-spheres, rather than being restricted to a religious mode of living.[653] Nevertheless, this can also be viewed as a quasi-religious aspect of Kierkegaard's notion of selfhood, so that there is at least a quasi-religious element in every constructive or upbuilding mode of existence. The self is "established" by the power in question, according to Anti-Climacus (SUD 14), so that one's self is derived from it. Thus, in the context that I have provided, one is derived from the freedom of the abyssal ground. To relate oneself to one's source and to rest in that relation is to recognise one's own necessity, but if one's source is a "cosmic freedom," one is simultaneously identifying with freedom and recognising one's own possibility in a deep sense. As is stressed by Pattison, "the self, according to Kierkegaard, does not and cannot create itself out of nothing," which is why the Judge in *Either/Or* claims that he chooses himself "from the hand of God" (EO-II 238).[654] Such an existential choice implies that one applies one's freedom to take responsibility for what is given and thus change one's relation to it. In this way, the abyssal ground also functions as a restriction on human self-creation *ex nihilo*, as well as countering the idea of freedom as licence, for the ground connects individuals to the cosmic order to which they belong. In this context, it is not hard to understand the claim made by Climacus in *Postscript* that freedom "is the wonderful lamp," so that "when a person rubs it with ethical passion, God comes into existence for him" (CUP-I 138). In this context it is also not hard to understand the passage from *Concept of Anxiety* that I quoted in chapter one, in which Haufniensis refers to a person sinking absolutely "in possibility" and becoming "dizzy," in detachment from one's organic context, but then emerging from the *Afgrund*, "the depth of the abyss," in a state of mind that is able to face "all the troublesome and terrible things in life" (CA 158).[655] In other words, it is a transformative experience to gaze into the abyss of existence and to ground oneself in a "cosmic freedom," recognising the depth of one's necessity and possibility, which helps in advancing one's self-becoming, according to which possibilities are actualised by being brought in line with necessity. Such grounding is open to the serious aesthete as well as the religious person in their process of becoming—and it is arguably fundamental to the art of living of both the aesthetic master and the knight of faith. In this regard, recall the statement of Kangas that I quoted in chapter one: "If one insists upon teleology, then one could say that the telos of human existence" consists in an "abandonment of every telos" and that such an abandonment can be

653 Recall that the fatalist, the one who has lost possibility, "has lost God and his self." (SUD 40).

654 Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 62.

655 See §1.3.

regarded as "the *absolute* telos."[656] The venue of becoming that is signified by Kierkegaard's framework of the existence-spheres, is not a ladder one ascends in order to reach an absolute *telos*, but the task is rather to descend into the abyss, ground oneself in freedom, and strive to concretise one's chosen ideals.

The abyss of freedom is also directly related to Kierkegaard's philosophy of becoming in a way that Žižek explains well in his interpretation of how history is conceived in *Fragments*: "when we are thrown into historical 'becoming,' caught in its flow, we experience the abyss of history's 'openness,' we are forced to choose" . . . and it is "in the name of this abyss of free decision that Kierkegaard turns against the retrospective 'comprehension of history' which endeavors to account for the necessity of what took place."[657] Climacus compares a person who claims to comprehend the logic of history to a "prophet in reverse" (PF 80), or as Žižek paraphrases it, "backward-turned prophets," who "are no better than those who pass forward prophecies," because "both are forgetful of the free decision involved in the act of becoming: if we observe the past as necessary, we forget that it is something that came into existence."[658] The bottom line is that it is uncertain how history will unfold, for it depends on human actions and thus belongs to the realm of spirit and freedom. The same applies of course to the life of individual human beings, perpetually in a process of becoming in the face of uncertainty. To view history and human life in such a way is a non-teleological stance—and to fully acknowledge such an "abyss of free decision" that influences the statement of Kangas on the "abandonment of every telos." It is a way of existing that he refers to as religious in the sense that individuals hold themselves "open to an ungrounding ground or abyssal ground."[659] According to him, "this is why at every decisive point Kierkegaard's texts invoke not transcendent *being*, but *nothing*."[660] However, this is not a description of a conventional religious awakening—and I am suggesting a reading according to which such an openness to the abyssal ground of freedom is wholly detached from the framework of the existence-spheres. The full significance of what I have addressed in this section will be made clear in relation to his category of repetition, to which I will now turn.

656 Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 8. See §1.3.

657 Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008/1992), 91. See also PF 73–88. As Žižek puts it, "when we cast a retrospective gaze on [history], its course loses the character of 'becoming' and appears as the manifestation of some 'eternal' necessity."

658 Ibid.

659 Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 8.

660 Ibid.

Chapter 4 Repetition unto Death

> Far from being a pale, ontic adumbration of the deep ontology of *Being and Time* Kierkegaard was already at work on making metaphysics waver like the late Heidegger. . . . In a manner profoundly comparable to Nietzsche, and on a point in Nietzsche that Heidegger missed, . . . Kierkegaard was at work on a disruptive, transgressive "deconstruction" of metaphysics."
>
> — John D. Caputo[661]

4.1 The category of repetition

4.1.1 The context of a new paradigm

In chapter one I introduced Kierkegaard's concept of repetition (*Gjentagelse*) and I argued that it characterises his creative impulse as a philosopher.[662] Moreover, I expressed the stance that the category of repetition is central to his conception of self-becoming. The way in which repetition is relevant to self-becoming has partially been revealed in the preceding chapters, but now I will address the essential meaning of the category and explain its full significance for my subject matter.

I mentioned in chapter one that repetition is an *existential* category: it conveys an ethical perspective, in the broad sense of pertaining to actual existence, as opposed to metaphysics. I also mentioned that the exposition of the idea is incomplete, and I explained its unfinished quality by invoking indirect communication and the role of the reader in shaping concepts.[663] However, there is more to this aspect of repetition: the category is not simply a theory or a doctrine in the sense of being a set of propositions, but rather a novel perspective in which to view human life—or, as Niels Eriksen puts it, "repetition is not so much a *philosophical doctrine* as it is a *paradigm of thought*."[664] According to Eriksen, there is also a facet in which repetition is a doctrine of sorts, but he correctly stresses its meaning as a paradigm, signifying "a mode of existing" in addition to "a view of existence."[665] The literary exposition of the category in the work *Repetition* can partly be explained in this context, because an indirect method is arguably needed in order to expound a certain approach to existence. A similar

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661 Caputo, "Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and the Foundering of Metaphysics," 204.

662 See §1.3.

663 Related to such interpretation is a journal entry which indicates a deliberate obscurity of *Repetition*, namely that the work is written in a way that "heretics" are unable to understand: "Since I wrote that little book 'so that the heretics would not be able to understand it,' it would be stepping out of character to explain it in somewhat greater detail" (R 282). *Pap.* IV B 109 *n.d.*, 1843–44. The quoted line in the entry is a reference to a line in the work (R 225). The point is also made in the letter to Heiberg (R 298). *Pap*. IV B 111 *n.d.*, 1843–44.

664 Eriksen, *Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition*, 2.

665 Ibid., 15

stance is taken by Clare Carlisle, who prefers to describe the category "as a way of being (becoming) and as a form of consciousness . . . rather than as a concept that can be extracted from its literary context and analysed systematically."[666]

In any case, provoked by a book review of *Repetition* by Heiberg, Kierkegaard wrote a posthumously published "open letter" to the reviewer (R 283),[667] as well as auxiliary journal entries, in order to correct what he regarded to be a gross misconception of the work and the category that it presented.[668] His will to clarify the meaning of repetition subsequently became evident in *Concept of Anxiety*, which includes an extensive footnote on the topic, where Kierkegaard, via Haufniensis, maintains that Constantius "stated the whole matter very precisely" in one crucial passage of *Repetition* (CA 18n), in which repetition is claimed to be the "interest [interesse] upon which metaphysics comes to grief":

> When the Greeks said that all knowing is recollecting, they said that all existence, which is, has been; when one says that life is repetition, one says: actuality, which has been, now comes into existence. If one does not have the category of recollection or of repetition, all life dissolves into an empty, meaningless noise. Recollection is the ethnical view of life, repetition the modern; repetition is the interest of metaphysics, and also the interest upon which metaphysics comes to grief; repetition is the watchword [*Løsnet*] in every ethical view; repetition is *conditio sine qua non*[669] for every issue of dogmatics. (R 149)[670]

The feature that I draw attention to in chapter one in connection to the contrast between repetition and recollection, is how one relates to time. I explained the point by referring to a friendship that is made concrete through a present-orientated repetition, rather than being forged through a mentality in which one dwells in either memory or expectation. Constantius makes the point in the context of love: "Repetition's love is in truth the only happy love," for "it has the blissful security of the [instant]," but neither "the restlessness of hope" nor

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666 Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 70. In the same vein, Jon Stewart makes the general point on Kierkegaard as a philosopher that he is eventually more concerned with presenting a new style of thought than he is with serious philosophical argumentation. Jon Stewart, *Idealism and Existentialism: Hegel and Nineteenth-and Twentieth-Century European Philosophy* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2010), 93.

667 Johan Heiberg, who I introduced in §1.1.2. *Pap*. IV B 110 *n.d.*, 1843–44. For an excerpt of the review, see R 379–83.

668 Appropriately, the response is signed by the same pseudonym that authored the work, Constantin Constantius. Even though the material has the evidential status of not being published by Kierkegaard, he is, via his pseudonym, drawing attention to aspects of the published text in *Repetition*. The reason why the material went unpublished is suggested by the journal entry regarding the deliberate obscurity of the work, mentioned above (see n663). In the entry, Kierkegaard also says the following: "Moreover, all that nonsense of Heiberg's is sheer triviality. I ought not to waste my time and to let myself be dragged down into the ephemeral spheres" (R 282–3). *Pap.* IV B 109 *n.d.*, 1843–44.

669 The indispensable condition.

670 This is the standard translation of Howard and Edna Hong, which I'll use, but it should be noted that the last three lines are translated differently by Walter Lowrie (R-L; Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1941) and M. G. Piety (R-P; Oxford: OUP, 2009) in a way that can be considered to be significant. Piety's rendition reflects Lowrie's and they translate "comes to grief" as "gets stranded" (Lowrie) or "becomes stranded" (Piety), and "watchword" (*Løsnet*) as "solution."

"the sadness of recollection" (R 131–2).[671] Moreover, the topic of time-relation is linked to how one approaches the eternal according to Haufniensis, who addresses recollection by stating that "for the Greeks, the eternal lies behind as the past that can only be entered backwards" (CA 90), while commenting in a footnote that one should keep in mind the category of repetition in this regard, "by which eternity is entered forwards" (CA 90n). Stephen Crites turns such metaphors of eternal past and eternal future into the crux of the subject matter.[672] In short, such metaphors denote what I referred to as time-consciousness in chapter two—and the contrast is between recollection's orientation towards the past and repetition's orientation towards the present, where one enters the future by facing forwards. Therefore, repetition signifies precisely what I designated as the time-consciousness of the synthetic instant, which I associated with Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming in its thick sense.[673] As Crites observes, the mentality of recollection is, for instance, captured by description of the young man's love affair in *Repetition*: at the beginning of the affair "he has imagined himself as an old man looking back on just these days, contemplating the present as if it were already a dried flower pressed in the pages of a book."[674] This prompts Constantius to deliver the assessment that by recollecting his love in such a manner, the young man "was essentially through with the entire relationship" (R 136)—"and his mistake was that he stood at the end instead of at the beginning" (R 137).[675] In such a condition, the present is sadly lost in the sense that it is not pregnant with the future: there is no process where changes occur by decisions and actions in face of uncertainty—in other words, there is no proper process of becoming. In order to solve the deadlock, the young man needs to find a way to recover his present and his future, which requires the time-consciousness of repetition.[676]

Moreover, as the crucial passage of *Repetition* suggests, there are other important features to the contrast between repetition and recollection, as I will now discuss. The initial question that must be answered is what is meant by an "ethnical view of life" and how it differs from the modern view that repetition represents. The secondary literature is not rich in analysis of the term "ethnical" in this context, which is *ethniske* in the original text.[677] Crites addresses

671 In the Princeton edition the term *Øieblikket* is here translated as "the moment," but I prefer "the instant." See §2.3.6.

672 He adds the "eternal present" to the scheme, which he associates with Nietzsche's notion of eternal recurrence. See Crites, "'The Blissful Security of the Moment,'" 233–241.

673 See §2.3.6.

674 Crites, "'The Blissful Security of the Moment,'" 229.

675 This is reminiscent of the theme of an essay in *Either/Or* called "The Unhappiest" (EO-I 217–230).

676 See Crites, "'The Blissful Security of the Moment,'" 232.

677 The sentence is as follows: "*Erindringen er den ethniske Livsbetragtning, Gjentagelsen den modern*."

the term in one insightful paragraph, in which he claims that "this odd term" is a translation of the German word *sittliche*, used by Hegel in his social philosophy to refer to "the fabric of language, custom, ritual, manners, morals, and law, that in a traditional society creates the sense of a coherent and unchanging social world."[678] Crites adds that "the interiorization by each individual of this intricate social fabric gives him or her an unambiguous sense of identity in such a traditional society."[679] The appropriate context in this respect is not the morality of Judge William that I associated with such social norms of *Sittlichkeit* in chapter three,[680] but rather the organic Greek city-state. The figure of Socrates signifies a turning point in history, according to Kierkegaard, because he rebelled against the social order of the city-state—its ethnic view of life. The heightened subjective awareness of Socrates ruptured such a paradigm and his ironic life-view marked the beginning of the modern view of life, characterised by subjectivity and a new sense of individual freedom. The modern paradigm of repetition thus signifies a break with an organic view of society, exemplified by the social norms of an ethnic tribe, in favour of a mode of living marked by subjectivity and freedom. Furthermore, recall that an aspect of the concept of recollection is the recovery of an ideal past in contrast to the ideal future of repetition.[681] The ethnical view signifies such ideality of the past, where an idealised past is perpetually being restored, while the modern view signifies the novelty of the future.

The interpretation I am offering receives strong support from the supplementary writings that Kierkegaard produced in response to Heiberg, as is evident by this clarification: "In my little book, I always spoke about the issues of freedom for the life of the individual. The Greek mentality was in one sense happy, but if this happiness ceased, recollection manifested itself as freedom's consolation; only in recollection and by moving backward into it did freedom possess its eternal life" (R 317).[682] Subsequently, the alternative is stated as follows: "The modern view, on the other hand, must seek freedom forward, so that here eternity opens up for him as the true repetition forward." Thus, the modern view of life—the paradigm of repetition—is to "seek freedom forward." Such association between repetition and freedom is in fact the focal point of the supplementary writings, as well as in the revealing footnote of *Concept of Anxiety*. I referred to that footnote in chapter one in order to demonstrate that the repetition that Kierkegaard is concerned with is not repetition in nature, but rather one

678 Crites, "'The Blissful Security of the Moment,'" 231.
679 Ibid.
680 See §3.3.1.
681 See §1.3.
682 *Pap*. IV B 117 *n.d.*, 1843–44.

"in the realm of the spirit," that is to say, a subjective repetition (CA 18n).[683] I also referred to the footnote in chapter two in relation to my discussion of freedom, where I drew attention to the statement that the task is "to transform repetition into something inward, into freedom's own task, into its highest interest, so that while everything else changes, it can actually realize repetition" (CA 18n).[684] I will return to this statement and the context in which it is made in the next subsection on becoming a self by repetition, but what is relevant at this point is the description of repetition as a paradigm of thought, according to which it becomes freedom's "highest interest." The open letter includes a useful commentary in this respect: "When applied in the sphere of individual freedom, the concept of repetition has a history, inasmuch as freedom passes through several stages in order to attain itself" (R 301). At first freedom is "qualified as desire [*Lyst*]";[685] then it is "qualified as sagacity [*Klogskabet*]";[686] and finally, "freedom breaks forth in its highest form in which it is qualified in relation to itself," which presumable means a high level of self-consciousness in relation to freedom, so that it reflects on itself and makes a breakthrough in true self-determination.[687] The link between self-consciousness and the advancement of freedom receives support from the work *Repetition* where the category of repetition is associated with "consciousness" raised to "the second power" (R 229).[688] Such higher consciousness is addressed in the open letter, where it is claimed to be "the most definite expression" of the position that the author conceives of "repetition as a development, for consciousness raised to its second power is indeed no meaningless repetition, but a repetition of such a nature that the new has absolute significance in relation to what has gone before, is qualitatively different from it" (R 307).[689] The development in question is also frequently referred to as "a task for freedom" in contrast to contemplation (R 312).[690] The bottom line is that the paradigm of repetition emerges when

683 See §1.3. In his book review, Heiberg had mistakenly associated repetition with cyclical processes in nature, while considering Hegelian mediation to be the appropriate category for the development of the human spirit (R 380).

684 See §2.3.5.

685 When freedom is qualified as such, repetition is feared, "for it seems as if repetition has a magic power to keep freedom captive once it has tricked it into its power" (R 301).

686 At this stage, "repetition is assumed to exist, but freedom's task in sagacity is continually to gain a new aspect of repetition" (R 301). *Klogskabet* can also mean "calculative thinking," as Kangas observes. Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 93.

687 The middle stage of sagacity is associated with the reflective aesthete in "Rotation of Crops" (R 302; see §3.3.1), which indicates that the initial stage refers to immediacy and the third one to an ethical-religious mode of living. This poses a challenge to my reading of the existence-spheres, because they are here being ranked by the advancement of freedom, whereas I seek to separate the existence-spheres from such progression. See §3.3.3. I will address the issue near the end of this subsection where I will argue that a proper repetition is available for aesthetes.

688 See the same expression in R 324 (a letter that Constantius writes to his "dear reader." *Pap*. IV B 120 *n.d.*, 1843).

689 See §2.3.4 on self-consciousness.

690 See also R 313, 315, 323, and 324.

one's self-determining agency has reached certain level of advancement—and at that level "freedom's supreme interest is precisely to bring about repetition" (R 302).

Such a focus on subjectivity and freedom in relation to repetition is perfectly in line with what immediately follows in the *Repetition* passage, for existential categories are normally contrasted to metaphysics by Kierkegaard: "repetition is the interest of metaphysics, and also the interest upon which metaphysics comes to grief." It is not obvious what is meant by these sentences, but according to the helpful commentary of Haufniensis, who seems to have known Constantius well, the "statement has reference to the thesis that metaphysics as such is disinterested, something that Kant had said about aesthetics," but "as soon as interest steps forth, metaphysics steps aside" (CA 18n). Haufniensis adds that "the whole interest of subjectivity steps forth, and now metaphysics runs aground," which strongly suggests that what the metaphysical approach cannot survive is subjective passion or pathos.[691] As I addressed in chapter one, the metaphysical notions that Kierkegaard primarily has in mind are Platonic recollection and Hegelian mediation,[692] but his target is nevertheless metaphysics in general. John Caputo offers a compelling analysis of the sentences in question. He draws attention to the Latin word that is here translated as interest, *Interesse*—which is composed of *Inter*, which means "between" or "in the midst," and *esse*, which means "to be" or "to exist—and what is important in his view is that "the existing spirit exists (*esse*) in the midst (*inter*) of time, caught in the interstices and corners of actuality."[693] What is essential to repetition, according to Caputo, is its courageous affirmation of temporal existence and its flux: it "presses forward" in face of uncertainty, while recollection tries to "arrest the flow" and mediation fails to allow it.[694] The disinterestedness of the metaphysical perspective consists in its "fixed essences" and its detachment from the flux, but "as soon as it allows itself to take account of actuality—movement and real change—it runs aground."[695] Caputo grounds his penetrating analysis to a large extent on a topic that I discussed in chapter three, namely Aristotelian *kinêsis* and becoming as change.[696] Caputo regards Kierkegaard as a brother in arms in transgressively deconstructing metaphysics and ontology.[697] In line with what I stated

691 See §3.2. It is noteworthy that in notes that Kierkegaard prepared for *Postscript* shortly after finishing *Repetition* he emphasises how essential passion is for subjectivity: "Subjectivity stresses *how* it is said, infinite passion is crucial, not its content, for its content is in fact itself" (R 327). JP V 5792 (*Pap.* VI B 17, 18) *n.d.*, 1844–45.

692 §1.3.

693 Caputo, *Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and the Foundering of Metaphysics*, 220. See also discussion in §2.3.4.

694 Ibid., 207. "Recollection takes one look at the flux and retreats" (208) and mediation "makes itself out as the friend of movement" but betrays it (210). See my discussion of recollection and mediation in §1.3.

695 Ibid., 221. See §1.3. and §3.1 on the Eleatics and the flux.

696 See §3.1.

697 Caputo, *Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and the Foundering of Metaphysics*, 204–205.

in relation to the moderate theatrical interpretation in chapter one, as well as the existential topography in chapter two, he maintains that Kierkegaard is not "arguing *for* an ontology, an Aristotelian one, for example (although that is what he appears to be doing a good deal of the time), but rather that Kierkegaard is arguing for the 'deconstruction' of ontology, the way ontology founders and comes to grief when it raises the question of repetition."[698] The open letter refers to *kinêsis* in order to explain the category of repetition—and the following passage is particularly relevant in the context of my thesis:

> When movement is allowed in relation to repetition in the sphere of freedom, then all development becomes different from the logical development in that the *transition becomes* [*vorder*]. In logic, transition is movement's silence, whereas in the sphere of freedom it becomes. Thus, in logic, when possibility, by means of the immanence of thought, had determined itself as actuality, one only disturbs the silent self-inclosure of the logical process by talking about movement and transition. In the sphere of freedom, however, possibility remains and actuality emerges as a transcendence. Therefore, when Aristotle long ago said that transition from possibility to actuality is a κίνησις [*kinêsis*; motion; change], he was not speaking of logical possibility and actuality but of freedom's, and therefore he properly posits movement. In all of Schelling's philosophy, movement likewise plays a major role, not only in the philosophy of nature (*stricte sic dicta*),[699] but also in the philosophy of spirit, in his whole conception of freedom. (R 309–10)[700]

To begin with, it is startling how deeply intertwined the concepts of repetition and becoming turn out to be, even to the extent that the word "repetition" in the first line could be replaced with "self-becoming." In fact, all the different associations and contrasts made in connection to the category of repetition are precisely the associations that I have demonstrated regarding self-becoming in chapters two and three: the forward-pressing temporality of the synthetic instant;[701] the advancement of self-consciousness and self-determining agency;[702] the pathos of subjectivity;[703] freedom in contrast to the logical system;[704] and the process of *kinêsis* where new qualities are brought into existence.[705] With regard to the last-mentioned feature, Caputo views repetition as a "movement in the eminent sense—futural, free, productive," in contrast to recollection which has an opposite temporal direction and in contrast to mediation that is not free in the sense that it produces nothing new beyond the dialectical unfolding of

698 Ibid., 205.
699 In the strict sense.
700 The concept of *kinêsis* is also linked to the category of repetition in the published text of *Repetition* (R 149).
701 See §2.3.6.
702 See §§2.3.4–2.3.5.
703 See §3.2. See also the segment on interestedness in §2.3.4.
704 See e.g. §1.3. and §3.1.
705 See §3.1.

qualities.[706] Likewise, Carlisle describes repetition as "a movement of becoming,"[707] which denotes—when "applied to the existing individual"—"a kind of kinesis of the self, a continual movement of coming into being.[708] Eriksen stresses in this context the relevance of repetition for identity, which according to him resides in such a process of becoming rather than residing in a realm apart from it—and repetition thus signifies "*a kind of becoming*."[709] Indeed, in light of the similarities I have listed, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the paradigm of repetition can be paired with the concept of self-becoming in its thick sense.[710]

However, the category of repetition is neither synonymous with the concept of self-becoming nor can it be reduced to the above-mentioned qualities. My contention is that repetition signifies the features of self-becoming because it is the *kernel* of the process in which one becomes a thick self, so that one becomes such a self through repetition.[711] In this regard, the focus must be on the conceptual core of repetition, which means to repeat something or an occurrence of something in a temporal succession. Moreover, as Ferreira observes, the Danish word, *Gjentagelse*, "is translatable as 'take again,' 'take back,' or 'retake,' as in a retake of a filmed scene."[712] Accordingly, Edward Mooney compares repetition to a "cinematic second or third take,"[713] although a retake of an act or a scene in the theatre would be a more appropriate analogy in relation to the Dane.[714] With this in mind, attention must be drawn to the line in the middle of the passage above where Kierkegaard states, via Constantius, that "in the sphere of freedom . . . possibility remains and actuality emerges as a transcendence," as well as a line that I have not yet addressed in the crucial *Repetition* passage, namely the statement that "when one says that life is repetition, one says: actuality, which has been, now comes into existence." The former line is easy to understand in the context I have provided in chapter two: the realm of the possible emerges through one's imagination and one applies one's freedom to make the movements of infinitude (or

706 Caputo, "Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and the Foundering of Metaphysics," 211.

707 Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 68.

708 Ibid., 78.

709 Eriksen, *Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition*, 15.

710 The thick self is the self that one achieves, both in relation to an advanced self-determining agency and an engraved character (see in particular §2.3.7); and the thick process of becoming is to be properly engaged in existence (see §3.1).

711 See my discussion in §§2.3.4—2.3.5 and §2.3.7.

712 Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, 43. See also Alastair Hannay, "*Repetition*: Getting the World Back," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 305 n23.

713 Edward Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Resolve: Kierkegaard's Moral-Religious Psychology from Either-Or to Sickness unto Death* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1996), 28. See also Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, 43.

714 See §1.1.1.

transcendence) and finitude in order to actualise possibilities and make ideals concrete.[715] New qualities are brought into existence through the effort of repeating the actions—and I have argued that such practice is at the heart of Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming. The repetition in question also consists in an idea existing in consciousness that is repeated in action, as the journals suggest (R 326),[716] but it is emphasised in the open letter that the category of repetition is not a series of isolated incidents, but part of a "development" of the human "spirit" (R 307), through which friendship, love, vocation, personal characteristics, et cetera, are gradually actualised in one's life. Carlisle does not describe what occurs in the same terms, but she shares the picture I am depicting. According to her, "when something is repeated it is reenacted, brought into existence," so that "it is not only represented as an idea, but recreated as a reality."[717] She also states that repetition expresses "the transition from ideality to actuality,"[718] as well as pointing out that the reverse occurs in recollection: "For Kierkegaard, truth implies actualization: an idea or possibility being brought into existence, as in repetition, rather than the transition from existence to idea that occurs in recollection."[719]

The line from the *Repetition* passage, on the other hand, is harder to grasp: what actuality in the past comes into existence in the present? It is contrasted to the mindset of recollection, where the present actuality "has been," so part of the meaning seems to be the forward movement of repetition in contrast to the backward movement of recollection.[720] However, the meaning of the line is hardly confined to such a notion. Carlisle understands Kierkegaard to be saying that "repetition signifies something that has passed away becoming actual once again."[721] Still, it is not clear what the relevance of this meaning would be. The Danish text in question is "*Tilværelsen, som har været til, bliver nu til*," which literally means: the existence, which has been (or has existed), now becomes (or now exists). It is not farfetched to read the line in the context of what I referred to earlier in the open letter regarding repetition where consciousness is "raised to a second power," so that "the new has absolute significance in relation to what has gone before" and is "qualitatively different from it" (R 307). In this context, the Old Testament figure of Job in the work *Repetition* becomes significant. The young man in the work views Job as an exemplar of repetition, not in the sense I have

715 See §§2.3.3–2.3.5.

716 JP III 3793 (*Pap.* IV A 156) *n.d.*, 1843.

717 Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 71.

718 Ibid., 85.

719 Ibid., 73.

720 See e.g. John D. Caputo, *Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 14–15.

721 Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 71.

accounted for but in an alternative sense: he takes or receives himself back after a great trauma.[722] What Job went through is viewed as an "ordeal" [*Prøvelse*] by the young man (209) and he was "blessed" and eventually "received everything double," which the young man identifies as "repetition" (212). As Eriksen observes, the question of guilt is central to the young man's conception of Job.[723] The guilt in question is a guilt of an existential sort, independent of any concrete wrongdoing.[724] This aspect of Kierkegaard's concept is charged with religious significance—and in the supplementary writings such repetition is associated with eternity and explained theologically in terms of sin and atonement: "as soon as the issue is posed dogmatically" repetition "will come to mean atonement" (R 324).[725] The young man has lost his way because of an engagement that had gone wrong and he was "waiting for a thunderstorm" that would "shatter" his "whole personality," so that his "honour will be saved" and his "pride will be redeemed" (R 214).[726] His hope is to achieve repetition in the sense of Job's ordeal and to return to his fiancée as a transformed man. There is a link between this transformative repetition and the paradigm of repetition that I have described, because the change is viewed as a qualitative shift in which he overcomes his mindset of recollection, which had damaged his engagement, and where he achieves what I have referred to as the time-consciousness of the synthetic instant, as well as other features that I have associated with the paradigm.

However, the woman he is concerned with marries another man (R 220), an event which generates in him a different sort of transformative repetition in which he takes himself back—an aesthetic repetition instead of a religious one. He transforms himself into a poet, although with "religious resonance" as Constantius puts it (R 228), as the young man becomes a poet whose consciousness is raised "to the second power" (R 229). His own vivid description of the transformation that occurs in him is worth considering; he regards himself as becoming unified: "I am myself again. This 'self' that someone else would not pick up off the street I have once again. The split that was in my being is healed; I am unified again" (R 220). He continues by expressing the rewarding nature of this subjective repetition: "Is there not, then, a repetition? Did I not get everything double? Did I not get myself again and

722 The young man ponders the famous saying of Job: "The Lord gave, the Lord took away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (R 197). See Job 1:21

723 Eriksen, *Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition*, 42.

724 The young man even states that "the secret of Job, the vital force, the nerve, the idea, is that Job, despite everything, is in the right" (207).

725 *Pap.* IV B 120 *n.d.*, 1843.

726 The "thunderstorm" is a reference to the Book of Job (37:4; 38:1; 40:1) and it signifies a life-shattering event of some sort. Howard and Edna Hong claim in an endnote that the concept is "a lower parallel" to something happening "by virtue of the absurd" (R 371 n17), but arguably the meaning does not have to be confined as such.

precisely in such a way that I might have a double sense of its meaning? . . . Here only repetition of the spirit is possible, even though it is never so perfect in time as in eternity" (R 221). He then claims to be born to himself: "I am myself again; the machinery has been set in motion. . . . My emancipation is assured; I am born to myself, for as long as Ilithyia folds her hands, the one who is in labour cannot give birth." Ilithyia (or Eileithyia) is a goddess of birth in Greek mythology, in this context signifying the symbolic rebirth that the young man experiences: his mode of living has qualitatively changed, and he has gained his creative powers and vitality. Next, he describes his new paradigm of the instant that is dawning on him: "In a minute I shall be there where by soul longs to be, there where ideas spume with elemental fury, where thoughts arise uproariously like nations in migration, there where at other times there is a stillness like the deep silence of the Pacific Ocean . . . there where each [instant] one is staking one's life, each [instant] losing and finding it again" (R 221). There is no doubt that these descriptions are at least partly autobiographical. As the Hongs observe in their introduction to the work, Kierkegaard wrote the following at one point: "I am a poet. But long before I became a poet I was intended for the life of religious individuality. And the event whereby I became a poet was an ethical break or a teleological suspension of the ethical. And both of these things make me want to be something more than 'the poet.'"[727] The words chosen by Constantius to capture the young man's transformation—a poet with religious resonance, equipped with heightened consciousness—are not a bad description of the ultimate author of *Repetition*.

For Constantius, the transformative aesthetic repetition of the young man does not qualify as a true repetition, which according to him is confined to the religious sort. The prevailing view in secondary literature is in agreement with him: this kind of repetition is commonly viewed as a religious category.[728] In line with the interpretation I have advanced in this thesis, however—supported by my sceptical reading of the *Point of View* writings and reflected in my non-teleological interpretation of the existence-spheres—I contend that transformative repetition should be understood broadly, to include the experience of the young aesthete in *Repetition* and such experiences across the spectrum of life-views.[729] First, my position in this regard is based on the key premise that Kierkegaard associates transformative repetition with an advancement of consciousness and freedom, both of which I have argued are

[727] Howard and Edna Hong, Historical Introduction to *Fear and Trembling and Repetition* (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1983), xvii. JP VI 6718 (*Pap.* X³ A 789).

[728] See e.g. Caputo, "Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and the Foundering of Metaphysics," 212.

[729] See §1.2.2, §1.3, and §3.3.

essential to any process of thick self-becoming, independent of the framework of existence-spheres.[730] Secondly, my position relies on Kierkegaard's own express will to preserve the dialectical quality of the authorship and his own expressed opposition to a subjective system that dispels the anxious dilemma of existential choice.[731] It is evident that transformative repetition is advantageous for any process of self-becoming—and if such advantage is reserved for the religious mode of living, the dialectical quality of the authorship is lost and the task of self-becoming is reduced to the difficulty of how one acquires a religious pathos and becomes a genuinely religious person, which in Kierkegaard's terminology is equivalent to becoming a true Christian. Thirdly, on a related note, Kierkegaard without doubt *invites* an interpretation according to which an aesthetic transformative repetition is a possibility. Recall that this point was mentioned in chapter one in reference to Robert Perkins, who argues that the restricting of such repetition to a religious mode of living misses a vital pluralistic aspect of Kierkegaard's view of the place, function, and variety of repetition in human existence: "The real hopefulness in Kierkegaard's understanding of our existential situation is that we obtain ourselves again in various sorts of ways, in various modes of existence, and that the modes of existence do not necessarily all follow the same course."[732]

However, although it is clear how such transformative repetition should be understood in the context of my account of the Kierkegaardian self in chapter two—namely as a certain level in the advancement of one's self-consciousness and one's self-determining agency—it remains to be explained how it should be understood in the context of my account of the becoming-process in chapter three. My view is that the new beginning of transformative repetition consists precisely of what I described at the end of the chapter in relation to one's openness to the abyssal ground: to establish oneself in cosmic freedom, to recognise one's necessity as well as one's possibility, and to take responsibility for one's life by choosing oneself and thus changing one's relation to the condition in which one finds oneself. Crites is expressing such a notion by stating that "although every self begins as a social self, the product of its upbringing and its social relationships, his ordeal marks the point so crucial in the entire Kierkegaardian literature, at which he takes sole responsibility for the self that he has been and will become."[733] In this way one takes oneself back in the sense I have discussed. Such transformation can be generated by an outside event, as in the case of the

730 See §§2.3.4.–2.3.5 and §3.3. Indications to the contrary should be read in context of the points that follow (see n687).

731 See my discussion in chapter one.

732 Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, 197.

733 Crites, "'The Blissful Security of the Moment,'" 235. See also e.g. Stack, "Repetition in Kierkegaard and Freud," 252.

young aesthete, and even for the aesthete it has a religious resonance, as Constantius observes. There is no reason to exclude aesthetes from the new beginning that results from becoming responsible in such a way.[734] The transformation can occur as a qualitative transition within an aesthetic horizon of meaning, although the creative fervour of the poet will of course differ from the serenity of atonement. It is significant for my interpretation of transformative repetition and its link to the abyssal ground of freedom that Kierkegaard views Leibniz as his only predecessor regarding such repetition (R 131).[735] In particular, the following suggestion of Carlisle should be kept in mind: "The *Theodicy* [by Leibniz] probably appealed to Kierkegaard because its account of God's creative power leaves room for the individual's freedom: when a person actualizes a possibility in his life, his self-expression coincides with God's determination, so that 'the divine activity is repeated in the activity of the monad.'"[736] In the same vein, Kangas interprets Kierkegaard as holding the view that a person constitutes "a repetition of the divine life."[737] When this is combined with the ideas of Schelling, which Kierkegaard praises in relation to freedom,[738] the picture emerges according to which individuals are repeating what I referred to as "cosmic freedom" and the end of last chapter, which allows both a religious and secular understanding, as I explained.[739]

The transformative repetition is supplementary to the repetition inherent in the perpetual process of self-becoming through which one becomes a thick self: these are two distinct types of repetition that should not be confused. It is the transformative type that is being referred to in the last line of the crucial passage of *Repetition*, where repetition is called the "watchword in every ethical view" (R 149). Transformative repetition can be regarded as an existential breakthrough in the perpetual process of self-becoming, according to which a more advanced approach to life is reached, corresponding to the paradigm of an aesthetic

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734 The young poet in *Repetition* is arguably transforming himself through such an existential self-choice. However, this is not a choice that is to be contrasted to a self-acceptance, for one is rather transforming one's relation to oneself by retrospectively choosing what is necessary—retrospectively choosing the cards one is given by providence—and then applying the responsibility to the future as well.

735 See §1.3.

736 Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 75. The last sentence is a reference to Eriksen, *Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition*, 119. Erikson is keen to draw attention to the context that Leibniz provides for the category of repetition. He points out that Kierkegaard studied *Theodicy* by Leibniz thoroughly (118), as journal entries suggest. See JP 5580, 2339 and 3073 (*Pap.* IV C 9, 12 and 29ff). Erikson also claims that Leibniz influenced Kierkegaard's conception of "transition, becoming, being, identity, etc." (118), which further indicates a link between becoming and repetition.

737 Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 101.

738 See e.g. R 310, which is part of a passage that I quoted earlier in this subsection: "In all of Schelling's philosophy, movement likewise plays a major role, not only in the philosophy of nature (*stricte sic dicta*), but also in the philosophy of spirit, in his whole conception of freedom."

739 See §3.3.4.

master or a knight of faith. In this sense it can be considered to signify what Carlisle refers to as "the dynamic opening up of inwardness, of subjectivity."[740] However, the everyday type of repetition, according to which possibilities are actualised, is crucial to the process of becoming from the beginning to the end. Unless otherwise stated, when referring to repetition in what follows, I mean the everyday practice.

4.1.2 Becoming a self by repetition

As I stated in the introduction, my basic claim is that the process of becoming is essentially the practice of repetition, or as I maintained in chapter one, that one becomes oneself through repetition. In chapter two I explained that the self that one becomes is a thick concept of the selfhood, where the following gradually occurs: (1) one's deeper self-element sufficiently develops; (2) one's self-consciousness and self-determining agency sufficiently develop, constituting and sustaining the synthesis between so-called physical and psychical factors; (3) one's inward sense of oneself sufficiently develops and one's outward character is formed through one's actions and behaviour, determined by decisions and resolve. The progress of the structural side of the self—the emergence of the deeper self and its tension with the first self, as well as the progress in the agency's self-determination—is a precondition for the formation of its substantial side. In the beginning there is no self-substance, but it gradually comes into existence when one's freedom is applied to actualise possibilities. The faculty of one's imagination opens up the realm of the possible and one chooses between options, which are in turn actualised by being brought in line with one's worldly situation. This process is described in terms of movements of infinitude and finitude. The actualisation occurs gradually through their perpetual repetition, which can be viewed as a patience of a sort. In this way, ideals can be made concrete to an ever greater extent. The totality of one's ideals in relation to selfhood constitutes the ideal self towards which one strives. Through this process one gains an improved sense of oneself and gradually engraves a character. All these aspects constitute the process of becoming in its thick sense, namely the task of becoming a thick self, the meaning of Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming. Furthermore, becoming signifies change and new qualities are brought into existence in the process of becoming, as I discussed in chapter three. There are certain traits that characterise those individuals who are attuned to an existence of change and who properly engage in the task of self-becoming. These traits belong to the concept, at least as its connotations, and they include the forward-pressing time-consciousness of the synthetic instant, which I address in

740 Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 83.

the second chapter, and the motivating pathos, which I addressed in the third one. In this chapter I demonstrated that such features of self-becoming are also features of Kierkegaard's paradigm of repetition, thus further binding the two concepts together. Moreover, in my non-teleological account of the existence-spheres I identified the theme of repetition in both an aesthetic mastery and in a knighthood of faith, as well as linking such dexterity to the act of confronting the abyssal ground of freedom and choosing oneself, thus expanding the notion of self-choice and responsibility from being confined to an ethical-religious mode of living. Finally, I linked such an advancement with the transformative repetition presented in the work *Repetition*, which I identified as a breakthrough in the process of self-becoming, both in its religious and aesthetic variety, thus reinforcing a reading of Kierkegaard that preserves the dilemma of what direction to take in life.

In light of the context that I have provided, it is not at all strange that Climacus states in *Postscript* that "for an existing person, the goal of motion is decision and repetition" (CUP-I 312). In order to press forward and actualise possibilities, one must make decisions and be resolute in the choice. The resolve in question must endure over time and it can be viewed as a perpetual subjective repetition of the decision made. This is precisely what Pattison means by stating that "patience is the constant renewal of the will which carries our resolve forward into the future."[741] In this way the category of repetition can be regarded as a constancy in how one applies one's freedom. The process of actualising possibilities concretely in one's temporal existence is of course a process of actions, not of thought, and repetition is likewise concerned with actions that generate the desired change. Crites calls repetition an action in the sense of being a movement that changes the self, [742] but a more precise description is to say that repetition is behind action. Kierkegaard's category of repetition signifies an "inward movement," as is emphasised by Carlisle, and she refers in that regard to the open letter: repetition must be found within the individual, . . . it is not a question of the repetition of something external but of the repetition of his freedom" (R 304).[743] In other words it is the subjective gesture that counts as a repetition, although the gesture will

741 Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Crises of Faith: An Introduction to His Thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 99. See my discussion of patience in §2.3.5.

742 Crites, "'The Blissful Security of the Moment,'" 241. His exact words are that "repetition . . . is action, self-transformative movement."

743 Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 74–76. Carlisle points out that Constantin echoes Judge William in this regard. It is noteworthy that the relationship between Constantin and the young man can be compared to the relationship between Judge William and Mr. "A."

manifest itself in the world through actions. As such, repetition is declared to be a "task for freedom" in the open letter and contrasted to the spirit of contemplation (R 312).

This is all in line with the footnote of Haufniensis in *Concept of Anxiety*, which I addressed in the last subsection, where the category of repetition is associated with inwardness and freedom. Now, I will address what immediately follows his claim that one's task is to turn repetition into freedom's highest interest, namely the statement "so that while everything else changes, it can actually realize repetition" (CA 18n). The meaning is that while there is nothing stable in the flux of life, at least individuals have it in their power to create constancy in the midst of constant change—and such constancy is created by subjective repetition. The function of the paradigm of repetition is thus twofold: one presses forward and engages in the process of change—according to which new qualities are brought into existence, as I discussed in chapter three—and one also creates the constant that undergoes the change.[744] Both of these aspects are required according to the ancient problem of becoming, as I have addressed, and which Eriksen lucidly articulates as follows: "Becoming presupposes both that there is something fixed and something that is in flux. If everything is fixed there is obviously no becoming; but equally, if all is flux there is no becoming for there is nothing against which change can be measured."[745] In relation to the self, repetition generates both the flux and the fixity against which the flux is measured. One creates a stable sense of oneself and continuity in selfhood through subjectively repeating the inward disposition that is expressed in the actualisation of chosen possibilities. One's commitment to an excellence in a chosen vocation is, for instance, perpetually and patiently reinforced through being inwardly repeated—which both establishes a specific identity and brings about its dynamic movement forward through the practice of ceaseless actualisation in which the ideal is made concrete.

Scholars who have made observations in this vein include Stack and Caputo. The former states that repetition "is central to the creation of continuity and purpose in existence" by "reaffirming one's personal commitment to the goal of becoming a self," as well as serving "as the means of intensifying subjective existence."[746] Caputo expresses the same point by stating that "repetition forges the self in time" and "produces self-identity and continuity by

744 See §3.1.

745 Eriksen, *Kierkegaard's Category of Repetition*, 14.

746 Stack, "Repetition in Kierkegaard and Freud," 252.

its own resolute, tenacious grip."[747] This receives strong support from the open letter where it is claimed that "repetition appears as a task for freedom, in which the question becomes that of saving one's personality from being volatilized and, so to speak, in pawn to events" (R 315). Caputo also states that "repetition requires the strength of soul to stay with time, from day to day, in an accumulating process of growth and inner development."[748] Note that the focus is here on inwardness rather than character, in line with what I argued in chapter two on inwardness being one's primary source of self-identification, while one is responsible for one's outward character.[749] This explains why Haufniensis says in the often mentioned footnote that "in the realm of the spirit, the task is not to wrest a change from repetition . . . as if spirit stood only in an external relation to the repetition of spirit" (CA 18n). For instance, one's inward integrity can be unaffected although one's character has for some reason been socially ruined. However, this does not mean that the task of self-becoming does not consist of character formation as well—and it would be contrary to the notion of becoming a self, in the thick sense, to ignore how inwardness is manifested in a character through the process of actualisation. This is reflected in Stack's statement that "repetition is the 'proper task of freedom' in the sense that it is through repetitious resoluteness that one shapes one's character."[750] In line with what I have argued throughout this thesis, Stack also claims that "the real movements or transitions characterizing the self-becoming of the individual are freely chosen repetitious 'movements' from potentiality to actuality in time."[751] In my view, this is precisely the type of repetition that is at the heart of the process of self-becoming. Also corresponding to my argument in this thesis is Caputo's claim that "the real question for Kierkegaard is whether and how the individual can get on the move, whether he can make existential progress, forge ahead in the process of becoming a self."[752] I have argued that such progress consists in the advancement of inwardness, namely the cultivation of one's self-consciousness and self-determining agency, as well as in character-formation.[753] What I have identified as a transformative repetition consists in a breakthrough in such progress. In

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747 Caputo, "Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and the Foundering of Metaphysics," 209. Caputo is also correct in observing that the continuity of repetition "is the way the individual survives the flux and establishes himself as a self," yet "without stacking the deck in advance, without providing for an assured result that does not risk real movement" (212), as is the case in Hegelian mediation according to Kierkegaard. See e.g. .§1.3.

748 Ibid.

749 See §2.3.7. One way of understanding the transformative repetition that I addressed in §4.1.1 can be to view it as a decisive private step in taking such a responsibility, in addition to the responsibility that is by necessity imposed on individuals in this respect by society.

750 Stack, "Repetition in Kierkegaard and Freud," 252.

751 Ibid., 253. However, I have used the word "possibility" instead of "potentiality" in order to confuse the process with organic development of some sort.

752 Caputo, "Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and the Foundering of Metaphysics," 207.

753 See §2.3.

addition to such a transformation, the most crucial transition in the process of self-becoming are, in my view, the transition between possibility and actuality, namely the transition in which ideals become concrete—and through which one's inward pathos is strengthened and one's character engraved. As is required in an account of Kierkegaard's concept of self-becoming, I have also discussed the framework of the existence-spheres, which I have explained as forms of life. The transitions between them, which I have put in context of aspect-dawning, are also transitions in relation to self-becoming, but contrary to the most common position in secondary literature, I argue against viewing such transitions as progress, for reasons I have explained.[754]

The account that I have given of self-becoming through repetition differs radically from the narrativist account of the self that has become popular to attribute to Kierkegaard. In chapter one I explained Anthony Rudd's narrativist interpretation of the Dane: the view that the concept of the self should be understood through the lens of a narrative that has enough coherence to make sense of events and generate meaning.[755] He interprets self-choice and self-actualisation as consisting in choosing and actualising a certain narrative structure, so that the self is constructed through one's own story of one's self. Thus, the self-substance, which I addressed in chapter two, is practically found in such a narrative. Self-identification thus becomes an identification with one's self-narrative. Narrativism has become a large topic in relation to Kierkegaard's philosophy of selfhood and there is unfortunately no space in this thesis to explore the various arguments and counterarguments in relation to it. Still, I consider the thesis to provide grounds for resisting a narrativist reading of Kierkegaard, that is to say, that it can be regarded as an ammunition for a future debate. A few points I have made are significant in this regard. First, a narrative identity is constructed around outward character, while I have demonstrated that self-identification primarily depends on inwardness, according to Kierkegaard, that is to say the self-conscious agency behind the character, for which it takes responsibility but to which it cannot be reduced.[756] The second point is directly related to this chapter: one's self-substance with which one identifies is shaped by subjective repetition where possibilities are actualised. Such repetition is centred on everyday pathos and everyday actions. As John Lippitt observes, "self-deception is a major

754 See §3.3.

755 See §1.3. See also Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 167.

756 See §2.3. In this regard, John Piper points out that "to know oneself according to one's external being is to suffer a delusion because the external is ever changeable, ever dubious, and thus one who posits something external to oneself as his criterion will himself remain dubious." Piper, "Kierkegaard's Non-Dialectical Dialectic or That Kierkegaard is not Hegelian," 509.

hurdle" for narrativism and the story one spins about oneself must be presumed to be prone to retrospective illusions and thus prone to be dubious.[757] A repetition-based conception of the self and its becoming is more likely to be a truthful way to acquire a sense of one's self, for in such an approach one should, for example, introspect one's daily emotions and reflect on one's actions in order to get to know one's true self-substance and acquire a corresponding identity. A narrative of friendship does not turn one into a friend, no matter how well the story is composed and no matter how sincerely one makes it part of one's identity. Rather, friendship is formed through perpetual repetition: by repeatedly going through the emotion of being a friend and by acting accordingly. In other words, the focus is on observing oneself instead of finding a unifying story. Of course, the observation will lead to a self-narrative of a sort, but one will have a stable ground in which to judge such a story, so that one reaches beyond the narrative as the legitimate basis for self-identification and thus overcomes the narrativist approach. Moreover, I have already mentioned Lippitt's criticism of Rudd regarding the extent to which one should strive to reach the coherence that is supposed to result from narrative unity.[758] Part of Lippitt's argumentation in that respect is related to a feature that I have focused on in relation to the paradigm of repetition, namely the forward pressing mindset that embraces change. He draws attention to an argument made by Philip Quinn, who points out that too strong an "emphasis on unity and wholeness" can impose "oversimplification within our ethical lives."[759] The danger, as Rudd stresses, consists in "simplifying by exclusion" so that one misses one's future adventure."[760] Lippitt also correctly observes that "a willingness to live with a degree of paradox and creative tension has at least as much claim to be considered 'Kierkegaardian' as does a picture that places perhaps too great a reliance on *Purity of Heart*," which in any case preaches one-sidedness in devotion rather than narrative unity of any sort.[761] The bottom line is that narrative unity becomes an existential straitjacket or a tunnel-vision, according to which one's focus is on letting events fit a narrative, instead of being alert to opportunities that may fall outside of the narrative. In

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757 John Lippitt, "Telling Tales," 89. Moreover, one's identity can at any moment be transformed through redescription.

758 See §3.3.3. It should be noted in this context that Rudd, who relies heavily on Judge William's account in *Either/Or* turns narrative unity into a distinguishing factor between the aesthetic and ethical spheres. However, Lippitt is correct in pointing out that "rather few of us cannot tell ourselves an intelligible story about who we are and what we are doing," so that such a "concept of intelligibility will certainly not enable us to distinguish between aesthetes and ethicists." Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," 8.

759 Philip L. Quinn, "Unity and Disunity, Harmony and Discord: A response to Davenport and Lillegard," in *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre*, eds. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2001), 330.

760 John Lippitt, "Forgiveness and the Rat Man: Kierkegaard, 'Narrative Unity' and 'Wholeheartedness' Revisited," in *Narrative Identity and the Kierkegaardian Self*, ed. John Lippitt and Patrick Stokes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 127. See also Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," 52–58.

761 Lippitt, "Forgiveness and the Rat Man," 133. See also Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight," 60–1. Recall that I mentioned in chapter one that Rudd relies heavily on *Purity of Heart* in addition to *Either/Or*. See UDVS 7–154.

this way narrativism can be considered to betray the time-consciousness of the synthetic instant, according to which one seizes the instant and presses forward in a process of perpetual change, attentive towards an open-ended future of possibilities.

This brings me back to the magical place where I began this thesis: the theatre, which can serve to expand imagination and enlarge the realm of the possible. The aim of Kierkegaard's theatrical approach to philosophy is to impact his readers subjectively so that they become attuned to existence, rather than to dictate what path they ought to choose—what possibilities they should actualise, what ideals they should make concrete.[762] Pattison puts it well by stating that Kierkegaard's "indirect method aims to preserve the freedom and responsibility of the learner" and that "the content of the teaching was itself the actualization of the learner's freedom."[763] Pattison further states that "it is only in the light of subjective activation of freedom that 'God comes into existence,'"[764] with reference to the passage of *Postscript* where Climacus claims "freedom" to be "the wonderful lamp" through which "God comes into existence" for an individual if it is rubbed with "passion" (CUP-I 138).[765] That may well be true. In any case, the point applies to the category of repetition: it emerges alongside one's freedom and the paradigm of repetition can become part of one's form of life alongside the advancement of one's self-determining agency. To view repetition in such a way demonstrates its status as an existential category in contrast to a logical one—and the difficulties in determining with certainty its exact meaning results from its existential nature, as Martijn Boven explains: "Logical categories can ideally exhaust their object in such a way that there is no uncertainty left. This is different in the case of existential categories. These categories will never be able ideally to exhaust their object because they are dependent on the person who is using them."[766] Boven then continues by claiming that "Kierkegaard tries to solve this difficulty by preserving the uncertainty inherent in these categories."[767] That is probably true—which would explain the hardship in defining many of his existential terms, including his concept of self-becoming. In fact, it is a central theme in Kierkegaard's account of both becoming and repetition, as I have demonstrated, that they are existential categories determined by freedom rather than logic. Hegel's mistake, according to Kierkegaard, was to

762 Clare Carlisle expresses the point in the following way: "The motif of the theatre illustrates the way in which Kierkegaard combines the techniques of dramatization and edification in order to create movement. . . . The aim is to bring about not an increase in knowledge, but an increase in inwardness." Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 88.

763 George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Crises of Faith*, 5.

764 Ibid., 13.

765 See also §3.3.4.

766 Boven, "A Theater of Ideas," 115.

767 Ibid.

confuse these categories. My non-teleological reading of Kierkegaard also results from such a distinction, that is to say, to prevent the process of *becoming through repetition* from being turned into a logical progression towards a predetermined end-goal. One way in which the non-teleological aspect of Kierkegaard's thought is expressed, according to Boven, is through the "performative writing strategy" of the work *Repetition*.[768] Most notably, this is done by use of the theatrical genre of farce, as Boven observes. In contrast to normal plays where "concrete actuality is translated into an abstract ideality by showing something essential that is not only valid for the character in question but applies to everybody," farce moves in the opposite direction, "from the abstract to the concrete."[769] Thus, instead of generating "universal templates of action that indicate how a courageous or chivalrous person is supposed to behave," farce "never reaches ideality but gets stuck in actuality," where for instance the accidental and the comical is emphasised.[770] So, rather than creating universal templates of action, the farce destroys them—and, as a result, "activates the viewers' own productivity and forces them to develop their own template of action."[771] In other words, Kierkegaard refrains from presenting an ideal towards which everyone ought to strive, while drawing attention to the challenge of making an ideal concrete. Kierkegaard was a man of conviction, without doubt, but his philosophy does not posit a universal template for action in the task of becoming a self.

4.2 The finality of death

"Then all is over!" is Kierkegaard's exclamation on death at the beginning of his discourse "At a Graveside," which is part of *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (TDIO 71).[772] The view of death that he expresses in his writings can be described as down-to-earth, and the Graveside discourse is no exception. Kierkegaard addresses both the certainty of death for every human being and the uncertainties associated with it, including when one will die.[773] He claims that death is "*decisive*" in the sense that it is final: "When death comes, the word is: Up to here, not one step further;[774] then it is concluded, not a letter is added; the

768 Ibid., 123. See §1.1.2. Recall that Kierkegaard creates a theatre of ideas, according to Boven, where philosophy is "performed rather than presented" (117). He e.g. draws attention to the following supplementary note: "I wanted to depict and make visible psychologically and aesthetically; in the Greek sense, I wanted to let the concept come into being in the individuality and the situation, working itself forward through all sorts of misunderstandings" (R 302).

769 Boven, "A Theater of Ideas," 127.

770 Ibid.

771 Ibid.

772 *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (TDIO), trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NY: PUP, 1993).

773 See also CUP-I 167.

774 See Job 28:11.

meaning is at an end and not one more sound is to be heard—all is over" (TDIO 78–79). As Patrick Stokes puts it, "however things stand at the point of death is how they will stand forever," although the timing of the event is "utterly unforeseeable."[775] The question of life after death, on the other hand, is regarded as incomprehensible by Kierkegaard and not worthy of speculation. His position in that respect can therefore be considered agnostic, although he appears to rule out any post-mortem life that resembles temporal existence, as can be deduced from another discourse where he comically states that "eternity is certainly not like a new world, so that the person who had lived in time according to the ways of time and busyness . . . now could try his hand at adopting the customs and practices of eternity" (UDVS 66). Moreover, from Kierkegaard's Christian point of view, "immortality is judgment," as he declares in his *Christian Discourses*, but "not a continued life as such in perpetuity" (CD 205).[776] From a Christian perspective the judgment in question is of course of a divine sort, but it should be noted that immortality is also judgment in the Norse pagan tradition that preceded Christianity in Denmark, as is evident from the "Sayings of the High One" (*Hávamál*): "Cattle die, kinsmen die, / the self must also die; / I know one thing which never dies: / the reputation of each dead man."[777] Here, the judgment is secular, namely how one is judged by other people, both by contemporaries and by future people. This can be viewed as an *aesthetic* variant of immortality as judgment.[778] In any case, Stokes is correct in observing that Kierkegaard "essentially equates death with annihilation, with no appeal to an afterlife,"[779] at least nothing that resembles the temporal existence in which the process of self-becoming is perpetual. It can thus be safely assumed that one's death marks the end of the process, so that one engages in *becoming through repetition* unto death.

The finality of death is relevant to Anthony Rudd's narrativist and teleological account of selfhood, because it is a person's "whole life as a narrative" that is directed towards a *telos*.[780] Rudd realises that although a narrative unity can be attained for episodes in one's life, it cannot be attained in the same way for one's life in its totality, as the end is missing. Still,

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775 Patrick Stokes, "Death," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, eds. John Lippitt and George Pattison (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 373.

776 *Christian Discourses*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton, NY: PUP, 1997). See also CD 206 where Kierkegaard stresses the point: "Immortality is judgement. There is not one more word to say about immortality; the one who says one more word or a word in another direction had better beware of judgment."

777 *The Poetic Edda*, rev. ed., trans. and ed. Carolyne Larrington (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 23 (verse 77).

778 This is the reason "eternal validity" can be understood in both a religious and secular way, as I mentioned in §3.1. See in this regard also SUD 21: "Eternity is obliged to do this, because to have a self, to be a self, is the greatest concession, an infinite concession, given to man, but it is also eternity's claim upon him."

779 Stokes, "Death," 372.

780 Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 183.

he considers it sufficient to approach the ideal of attaining this narrative identity.[781] Pattison addresses Rudd's theory in this regard and convincingly argues that "this unattainability has more dramatic implications than Rudd acknowledges, since it retrospectively undermines the narrative thesis as such."[782] He asks: "If the end of the story is necessarily missing or if a range of alternative endings are all equally plausible, what sort of story is it?[783] Pattison draws attention to the radical contingency in relation to death and how it can affect the perceived course of people's lives beyond their control. His conclusion is that "what Kierkegaard calls the uncertainty of death is not just a matter of when death will come or how we might comport ourselves in our final moments but the quiet relativisation of all possible narratives we may tell about ourselves or that others may tell about us."[784] This is a problem that does not apply to self-identity grounded on repetition. There is a way in which death becomes a *telos* for the narrativist, because the story is progressing towards its end in death—and Pattison stresses his point by stating that "death cannot be used to give to human existence a *telos* it doesn't have."[785]

As is so often the case with Kierkegaard, his writings on death are meant to have significance for how to make the most of life. He considers it to be vital for people to keep in mind their mortality, to think about death in earnest, "to think that all is over, that there comes a time when all is over." To confront one's finality in all seriousness, according to Kierkegaard, "gives life force as nothing else does; it makes one alert as nothing else does" (TDIO 83), so that one is propelled "back into life with renewed urgency" (TDIO, 85).[786] Kierkegaard's previously mentioned position on post-mortem survival serves to make such thoughts effective, because as Mario von der Ruhr observes, to envision such a survival removes the "sting" of the "final break."[787] The sting of finality that results from a serious contemplation of death is a "schoolmaster of earnestness" (TDIO 75). It can change one's approach to life

781 Ibid., 183–184.

782 George Pattison, "The End? Kierkegaard's Death and its Implications for Telling his Story," in *Narrative, Identity and the Kierkegaardian Self*, ed. John Lippitt & Patrick Stokes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 206.

783 Ibid.

784 Ibid., 213.

785 Ibid., 214.

786 See e.g. Edward F. Mooney, "The Intimate Agency of Death," in *Kierkegaard and Death* eds. Patrick Stokes and Adam J. Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 134: "Nor, for the would-be Christian Kierkegaard, is death covered over by a vision of afterlife. Death adds luster to *this* life. . . . Death is a teacher and a mentor, a disturber of selves and a minister to souls, in *this* life. Death obtrudes in a revelatory restructuring of the attentive soul."

787 Mario von der Ruhr, "Kant and Kierkegaard on Eternal Life—A Reply," in D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin eds., *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000), 216. See also Stokes, "Death," 378. In this regard, it should be noted that Ahasuerus is said to be the "the unhappiest one" in *Either/Or* because he "could not die" (EO-I 220). Legend has it that he was cursed to walk the earth aimlessly forever, cursed to live and never die. The anguish of endless time is essential to Kierkegaard's understanding of the Ahasuerus; it's an extreme example to prove a point: if his life is compared to a novel, it's a novel without an end.

so that one seizes the day for work (TDIO 83), yet not in a manner in which the future is disregarded: "Earnestness . . . becomes the living of each day as if it were the last and also the first in a long life, and the choosing of work that does not depend on whether one is granted a lifetime to complete it well or only a brief time to have begun it well" (TDIO 96). Such a focus on the present (each day as the last) while facing the future (each day as the first) signifies precisely the time-consciousness of the synesthetic instant, a vital feature of the paradigm of repetition as well as of the process of self-becoming. Thus, it is by serious contemplation of death that people can become properly attuned to temporal existence. This is what Kierkegaard means by stating that "no thinker grasps life as death does" (WL 345).[788] What should be grasped about temporal existence, according to Kierkegaard, is at the heart of his conception of self-becoming: its various paths unfold in freedom and are subjected to constant change in a manner that defies being confined within a system. The flux overcomes every human teleology and breaks every human narrative.

[788] See the final paragraph of the introduction.

Conclusion of Thesis

> I know of no other great writer in the whole nineteenth century, perhaps even in the whole of world literature, to whom I respond with less happiness and with more profound sense that I am on trial and found wanting, unless it were Søren Kierkegaard.
>
> — Walter Kaufmann[789]

In this thesis, I have accounted for Kierkegaard's conception of self-becoming. In chapter one I defended my moderate theatrical interpretation of the Dane. It shares all the basic tenets of Schönbaumsfeld's moderate reading, including the view that Kierkegaard's philosophy is essentially non-teleological in the sense that there is no teleological system of subjectivity, no ladder to paradise. Moreover, my interpretation is theatrical in the sense that the most suitable vantage point on Kierkegaard's authorship is determined to be the theatre, so that his activity as an author is compared to that of a stage director of plays with philosophical relevance. The main purpose of the Kierkegaardian theatre is to stimulate self-becoming by expanding the imagination of readers and exposing them to possibilities, which serve as an education in freedom, as Pattison observes, and as a platform for character-formation. The moderate theatrical reading is thus directly linked to the topic of self-becoming. The central objection against such a reading is the autobiographical narrative of 1848, and I therefore argued in great detail against the reliability of that narrative. Subsequently, I established that Kierkegaard's creative impulse as a poet-philosopher is to be found negatively in his opposition to Hegelian mediation and positively in the category of repetition, which I consider to be of fundamental importance to his concept of self-becoming.

In chapter two, I explained Kierkegaard's concept of the self. I discussed how immediacy is interrupted by language, as well as identifying language acquisition as the beginning of the human self, both in the history of the species and in the story of each individual. Moreover, I explained the role of anxiety as a *primus motor* for the process of self-becoming. Anxiety is a feeling of unease that accompanies one's sense of freedom or the potentiality of freedom, effectively demanding a resolution in relation to selfhood. Next, I accounted for Kierkegaard's two different—although not necessarily mutually exclusive—perspectives on how the self is constituted. On the one hand, there is the perspective of a struggle between the

[789] Walter Kaufmann, introduction to *Religion from Tolstoy to Camus*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1961), 3. The writer Kaufmann is comparing to Kierkegaard is Leo Tolstoy.

first self-element and the deeper self-element. I explained these self-elements, as well as the tension between them, by demonstrating that the triad of *immediacy–first self–deeper self* corresponds to the triad of *id–ego–superego* in the structural model of Freud. On the other hand, there is the perspective of the relational view of selfhood, where one's spirit—which I identify as one's self-consciousness and self-determining agency—constitutes and upholds a synthesis between the psychical and physical sides of the human being. The physical side stands for the limiting factors of one's "immanent" first nature—finitude, reality, necessity, and time—while the psychical side stands for the expanding factors of one's "transcendent" second nature—infinitude, ideality, possibility, and eternity. The self-determining agency shapes the self by repetition of the movements of infinitude and finitude, in which imagined possibilities are chosen and actualised by being brought in line with necessity. In this way, chosen ideals are gradually made concrete. Both one's inward agency and one's outward character, for which the agency takes responsibility, are shaped in this process—and this is the meaning of Kierkegaard's notion of self-becoming, so that one becomes oneself through the patience required in the gradual actualisation. The self that one becomes is a self in the thick sense of the term in contrast to the thin self that one already is. In the context of the first self-element and the deeper one, the thick self is the self where the deeper self-element is sufficiently developed, independent of which one of the elements succeeds in the struggle and becomes dominant. In the context of the relational view of selfhood, the thick self is the self that is achieved when the self-determining agency is sufficiently advanced and when a character has been properly engraved through decisions and resolve.

In chapter three, I focused on the "becoming" aspect of self-becoming. I established that becoming signifies change and that the process of becoming refers to transitions in which new qualities come into existence. The Kierkegaardian *kinêsis* is the change that occurs when possibilities are actualised. The change in question takes place through the application of freedom, but not when something merely unfolds in a natural, organic, or logical manner. As applies to the self, there is a process of becoming in a thick sense, where one is properly engaged in the dynamism of temporal existence with intensity and pathos. In addition to anxiety, one's pathos motivates the process of becoming. Pathos emerges in the contrast of selfhood and it signifies the passion with which one enlists in the task of becoming, as well as the suffering involved in the striving. The choices one makes in life are also partly shaped by the inclinations of one's pathos, either consciously or subconsciously, including the ultimate end-goal towards which one strives. Such end-goals are an important aspect of the distinction between an aesthetic mode of living and an ethical-religious one. The aesthete

strives for happiness while the ethical-religious person strives for blessedness. The framework of the existence-spheres can also be viewed in context of the struggle between the first self-element (ego) and the deeper one (superego), so that the former element becomes dominant in aestheticism, while the latter element becomes dominant in ethical and religious life-views. In this regard, however, I distinguish between a frivolous aestheticism, where the deeper self-element is underdeveloped, and a serious aestheticism where it is sufficiently developed. An existence-sphere is a form of life and the transition between spheres can be described in terms of aspect-dawning, according to which different coordinates of meaning are perceived. To achieve either an aesthetic or an ethical-religious mastery can be regarded as different ways to constructively manage the uncertainty of existence. I contend that such mastery is linked to an openness to the abyssal ground of freedom, through which one transforms oneself by taking full responsibility for oneself, a transformation that can thus be achieved across the existence-spheres. This is progress that can be achieved in the process of self-becoming—and progress can also be made in advancing one's agency and in forming one's character—but, I argue that the existence-spheres are not a venue for such progress, as they would be turned into a teleological system of subjectivity—akin to a system of Hegelian mediation— in stark contrast to what I established in relation to the moderate theatrical reading and in relation to Kierkegaard's creative impulse.

In chapter four, I accounted for Kierkegaard's category of repetition. I demonstrated that the paradigm of repetition is closely connected to the process of self-becoming in its thick sense, where one is properly attuned to temporal existence. This includes the advancement of the self-determining agency and what I designated as the time-consciousness of the synthetic instant, according to which one is focused on the present while pressing forwards, oriented towards the future. This is contrasted to both the mentality of recollection, where one presses backwards towards a conception of past-ideality, and the mentality of hope, where the present is overridden by future expectations. Moreover, I established that repetition in its basic sense is at the core of self-becoming in a twofold way. On the one hand, by the constant repetition involved in the actualisation of possibilities and the concretisation of ideals, through which a person's thick self is forged through repetition. On the other hand, it involves what I referred to as a transformative repetition, according to which one's consciousness is raised to a second power, as Kierkegaard puts it. This sort of repetition is associated with both aesthetic creativity and religious atonement. It is a repetition in the sense that one repeats cosmic freedom in one's own application of freedom, and I identified such transformative repetition as the openness I described in relation to the abyssal ground

of freedom. The transformation can be viewed as a breakthrough in the process of becoming, yet not one that can be explained in terms of a teleological system. Moreover, I explained how the category of repetition can be viewed as a source of self-identity that does not suffer from the problems involved in a narrativist account of selfhood. Finally, I established that the perpetual process of self-becoming terminates in death—and that the earnest thought of death generates the time-consciousness of repetition and teaches people how to be properly attuned to the ever-changing flux of life.

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