

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

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**KIERKEGAARD**

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*Edited by*  
JOHN LIPPITT  
*and*  
GEORGE PATTISON

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## CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	v
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xi
<i>References to Kierkegaard's Works</i>	xvii
<i>Abbreviations of Titles of Kierkegaard's Works</i>	xix

Introduction	1
GEORGE PATTISON AND JOHN LIPPITT	

### PART I CONTEXTS AND SOURCES

1. The Textual Inheritance	11
STEEN TULLBERG	
2. Kierkegaard and the End of the Danish Golden Age	28
BRUCE H. KIRMMSE	
3. Kierkegaard and Copenhagen	44
GEORGE PATTISON	
4. Kierkegaard and German Idealism	62
LORE HÜHN AND PHILIPP SCHWAB	
5. Kierkegaard and Romanticism	94
WILLIAM McDONALD	
6. Kierkegaard and the Church	112
ANDERS HOLM	
7. Kierkegaard and Greek Philosophy	129
RICK ANTHONY FURTAK	
8. Kierkegaard and the Bible	150
PAUL MARTENS	
9. Kierkegaard and the History of Theology	166
DAVID R. LAW	

PART II SOME MAJOR TOPICS  
IN THE AUTHORSHIP

10. Pseudonyms and 'style'	191
EDWARD F. MOONEY	
11. Ethics	211
C. STEPHEN EVANS AND ROBERT C. ROBERTS	
12. Selfhood and 'Spirit'	230
JOHN J. DAVENPORT	
13. Formation and the Critique of Culture	252
JOAKIM GARFF	
14. Time and History	273
ARNE GRØN	
15. Kierkegaard's Theology	292
SYLVIA WALSH	
16. Society, Politics, and Modernity	309
MEROLD WESTPHAL	
17. Love	328
M. JAMIE FERREIRA	
18. Irony	344
K. BRIAN SÖDERQUIST	
19. Death	365
PATRICK STOKES	

PART III KIERKEGAARD AFTER  
KIERKEGAARD

20. Translating Kierkegaard	385
ALASTAIR HANNAY	
21. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche	402
MARKUS KLEINERT	

22. Kierkegaard and Heidegger	421
CLARE CARLISLE	
23. Kierkegaard and Phenomenology	440
CLAUDIA WELZ	
24. Kierkegaard and Postmodernism	464
STEVEN SHAKESPEARE	
25. Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and the Wittgensteinian Tradition	484
ANTHONY RUDD	
26. Kierkegaard and Moral Philosophy: Some Recent Themes	504
JOHN LIPPITT	
27. Kierkegaard as Theologian: A History of Countervailing Interpretations	528
LEE C. BARRETT	
28. Kierkegaard and Modern European Literature	550
LEONARDO F. LISI	
29. Kierkegaard and English Language Literature	570
HUGH S. PYPER	
<i>Index</i>	591

## CHAPTER 12

## SELFHOOD AND 'SPIRIT'

JOHN J. DAVENPORT

I. INTRODUCTION: KIERKEGAARD,  
EXISTENTIALISM, AND PERSONALISM

IN his major pseudonymous works and in some of his signed writings, Søren Kierkegaard develops a conception of personal selves that is closely related to his account of the three existential 'stages' or basic attitudes towards life (and their various sub-stages<sup>1</sup>). It is also closely related to his notions of sincerity and earnestness in agency, and to his conception of freedom. In this chapter I will approach these issues by focusing on Kierkegaard's conceptions of self, passion, and will in general—especially in his two main psychological works, *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness Unto Death*. I concentrate on major themes in the primary texts, with moderate attention to a few key developments in the secondary literature.

First, a note on terminology. I follow Merold Westphal's view that for Kierkegaard, as we see in the Climacus writings, 'selfhood is the goal rather than the presupposition of my existence' (Westphal 1996: p. ix): 'human beings' exist before they become 'selves', even though the potential for selfhood is latent within them. For, as Mark C. Taylor argues, within 'Kierkegaard's phenomenology of spirit' or portrayal of different basic attitudes towards life, a human person in her default form is only a potential self 'in the spiritlessness of immediacy'; even when reflective self-awareness begins, 'since the person still has not become a self-determining agent, he is not yet a concrete individual' (Taylor 2000: 234–7). To explain, a reflective aesthete like Johannes the Seducer moves and interacts with others, but not in the deeper sense of *autonomous* choice: he is 'unwilling to take definitive action' or commit to any form of 'concrete existence' (Taylor 2000: 238). Used this way, the 'individual' or 'self' is virtually equivalent to 'authentic self'

<sup>1</sup> On the theory of the stages or 'existence-spheres', see the chapter by Evans and Roberts in this volume.

(Taylor 2000: 238). However, the full range of ontological development in Kierkegaard's various accounts implies that there is room for a human person to have acquired a 'self' without having yet become a fully authentic self in faith. While Kierkegaard and his major pseudonyms often refer to people as lacking 'a self' (*selv*), they also frequently refer to an inauthentic 'self', or to more deficient versus more adequate forms of 'self'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, commentaries often speak of 'the self's development' from initial aesthetic to ethical and religious life-views (Hannay 1982: 159); this is partly because the first major step in the will's awakening to ethical consciousness is seen as the first acquisition of a definite and positive identity that is distinct from one's given desires, temperament, and socially acquired habits (SKS11: 151/SUD: 34–5). Still, in their strictest formulations, Kierkegaard and his more authoritative pseudonyms refer to 'self' narrowly as the authentic ideal of personhood, and I largely follow that usage below.

Second, some brief historical background will help. From the point at the end of the nineteenth century when Kierkegaard's work began to be taken seriously beyond theological circles, philosophers have recognized that both his pseudonymous and signed writings suggest that appreciating our ethical responsibilities and the importance of faith require at least an implicit recognition of what it is to be a person with the potential for 'selfhood' as a *telos* (SKS11: 149/SUD: 33). Just as a concern for self is central to the account of 'existential tasks' in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, and a proper sort of 'self-love' is seen as integral to developing our capacity for agapic love of God and neighbour in *Works of Love* (SKS9: 30–1/WL: 22–3), much of Kierkegaard's writings on ethical consciousness suggest that the volitional 'movements' involved in attaining a definite practical identity are crucial for one's understanding the extent and nature of one's moral obligations. In this respect, Kierkegaard's approach is formally similar to Aristotelian eudaimonism in recognizing an essential connection between appreciating what we *are* and what we are *meant* to become—though Kierkegaard denies that we can only will happiness or that the content of ethics can be fully based on natural knowledge of human nature or the requirements of happiness in social life.<sup>3</sup> As Alastair Hannay says, for Kierkegaard, ethics in its true 'eternal' form cannot be explained by pre-ethical conditions of human beings as a natural kind (Hannay 1982: 158–60). Still, Kierkegaard's (direct and indirect) analyses of selfhood are based on practical concerns; like Kant, he recognizes the priority of the practical standpoint in philosophical anthropology and philosophical psychology.

While much of the early reception of Kierkegaard focused on his novel but difficult treatment of religious faith, his critique of Hegel, and his emphasis on decision, his

<sup>2</sup> In his signed writings, Kierkegaard often simply refers to 'the person' or 'a human being'—e.g. throughout the edifying discourse 'On the Occasion of a Confession' (in TDIO), and in 'Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing' (in UDVS).

<sup>3</sup> Kierkegaard's rejection of eudaimonism is evident in his account of positive evil in *Sickness*: see SKS11: 209–11/SUD 9699. See also Davenport 2001b: 302–8; Johnson 2001; and Davenport 2007: ch. 10. Many readers also see *Works of Love* as rejecting eudaimonism, but it may not follow from commanded agapic love that created persons have a *natural* capacity to will ends unrelated to their eudaimonia. For a non-eudaimonist interpretation of Kierkegaard's highest good, see Glen 1997.

enormous influence on twentieth-century existential philosophy shows that thinkers such as Heidegger, Jaspers, and Sartre took Kierkegaard to be proposing (at least indirectly) a new conception of selfhood.<sup>4</sup> On their view, according to Kierkegaard, the freedom that persons exercise *in time*—rather than as Kantian noumenal selves with an atemporal identity that is fixed like that of a Leibnizian monad—means that persons ‘exist’ in a different way than any mere object has being, since persons are always aware of future possibilities and restrictions on their options arising from their situation and their past. Many contemporary commentators rightly emphasize that Kierkegaard was not an ‘existentialist’ in any sense associated with Sartre’s conception of groundless free choice or Nietzsche’s rejection of any eternal truths. However, Kierkegaard frequently implies that the uniqueness of a self is not like the instantiation of a kind-essence in particular matter, nor is it the individuation of an ongoing mental substance: ‘an individual human being cannot be thought’ (SKS11: 230–1/SUD: 119; see Davenport 2001c: 135 on the difference between substance and the human ‘race’). Like existential thinkers who are indebted to him, Kierkegaard holds that a ‘self’ arises through the experiences that a human being undergoes and the choices he makes in response; the personal being that is already ‘there’ at the start of this process begins as a kind of ‘dreaming spirit’ not even aware of its potential (SKS4: 354/CA: 48) and has to achieve the ‘inwardness’ or reflexive relations that constitute a self or fully personal identity. Similarly, the child begins as ‘neither good nor bad’ (SKS4: 379/CA: 76). Thus Sartre read *The Concept of Anxiety* and a key journal entry by Kierkegaard as teaching that, by refraining from direct control, God forces Adam to become free: ‘The Self is chosen finitude, nothingness affirmed and delimited by an act; it is determination conquered by defiance...’ (Sartre 1956: 90). While this is too extreme—for Kierkegaard actually reserves ‘defiance’ for a radical stance of the will against any dependence on God—Sartre is correct that for Kierkegaard, a ‘living subject’ is distinct from any object of knowledge and involves an ‘interiority’ that is unlike that of a detached speculative knower (Sartre 1956: 80). This is not simply a result of consciousness, or even consciousness capable of explicit self-reflection, but due instead to the *free volition* involved in the stream of personal consciousness.

However, Kierkegaard’s existential successors tended to construe his conception of the self as radically individual or even solipsistic. On the contrary, like a wider range of ‘personalist’ thinkers such as Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, and Emmanuel Levinas, Kierkegaard’s writings depict human selves as essentially *dialogical* or inextricably related to others—first of all to God, but through God to human neighbours. The capacity for love, which is the shared mark of personhood in all of us and the origin of each individual will, is oriented outwards (SKS9: 17/WL: 9), though it also enables reflexively proper self-love. Kierkegaard also depicts an *intrasubjective* dimension of individuality

<sup>4</sup> Some other existential thinkers, such as Karl Jaspers, put Kierkegaard with Nietzsche as mainly challenging all forms of ‘reason’ rather than offering any new *ontological* insights (Jaspers 1932). Yet Jaspers’s own arguments that I discover within my freedom as ‘the source of my self-being’ that I have not absolutely created myself, that ‘where I am wholly myself I am not only myself’ (Jaspers 1932: 95), could serve as a helpful gloss on the basic ontological thesis of *The Sickness Unto Death*.

that does not simply reduce to intersubjective relations; this is part of his break with Hegel, and it still distinguishes his view from entirely social theories of selves that have developed from Hegel in contemporary pragmatism (e.g. Mead 1934), Critical Theory (e.g. Habermas 1979: ch.2; and 1987: Lecture XI), and various communitarian conceptions (e.g. Sandel 1982). For Kierkegaard, authentic community or ‘solidarity’ requires not only that each member is ‘educated to make up his own mind instead of agreeing [automatically] with the public,’<sup>5</sup> but also that he become a ‘single individual’ or ‘someone’ with a distinct practical identity by being ‘essentially engaged’ or devoted to something noble beyond himself (SKS8: 87–8/TA: 91–3). Thus, like other major thinkers in the personalist tradition, Kierkegaard implies that *alterity* as an ethically significant irreducible difference between individuals is essential to selfhood.

## II. THE ONTOLOGY OF SELFHOOD IN THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH

As noted above, the idea that an ontology of selfhood can be found in Kierkegaard’s writings is implied in development of his themes by later existential authors. One of the first analytic scholars to argue that Kierkegaard was concerned to present and defend such an ontology is John Elrod,<sup>6</sup> whose thesis is that ‘the concept of the self in the pseudonyms’ provides the basis for Kierkegaard’s ‘unified view of human existence’ (Elrod 1975: 9). Given the priority of practical import in Kierkegaard’s writings (signed and pseudonymous) and his focus on bringing readers to a deeper appreciation of what is at stake in life, his ontology of the person is not presented as a thesis in systematic metaphysics or defended by arguments of the sorts familiar from European rationalist or empiricist traditions. Rather, it is offered as a conception to which we are implicitly committed in our practical experience and defended by psychological evidence: it is a hypothesis that explains what is wrong with several attitudes towards life or forms of identity that are disclosed as inadequate both in actual human existence and in an imaginative presentation of several possible variations on stances that we find in real human characters. In other words, we receive from Kierkegaard not a metaphysics of self-identity but a practical phenomenology, which assumes that the reader already has certain interests and experiences, and can recognize the possibility of other types of personality on this basis. In fact, the two works in which Kierkegaard is generally held to have focused most clearly on a ‘psychology’ or account of selfhood both begin with certain dogmatic assumptions from revealed Christian teachings as well, such as the reality

<sup>5</sup> In this respect, Kierkegaard’s famous essay on ‘The Present Age’ (see SKS8: 66–106/TA: 68–112) stands in a long tradition that includes Kant’s ‘What is Enlightenment’ and Mill’s *On Liberty*, along with influential essays on freedom of speech and press by John Milton and John Locke.

<sup>6</sup> Though Elrod acknowledges debts both to Michael Wyschogrod and to Calvin Schrag (Elrod 1975: 7).

of sin and creation *ex nihilo*. Although both these books—*The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness Unto Death*—are attributed to pseudonyms, they offer more direct or ‘dialectical’ analyses of different ‘conscious states’ (Hannay 1982: 157); and ‘Anti-Climacus’, who is the pseudonymous author of *Sickness*, is meant to be an ‘extraordinarily high’ or advanced Christian author who Kierkegaard distinguishes from himself not to indicate disagreement with him but from humility (see the Hongs’ introduction, SUD, pp. xxii–xxiii). Similarly, the pseudonymous author of *Anxiety*, ‘Vigilius Haufniensis’, seems to be authoritative although he focuses on types of ‘anxiety’ that are psychological conditions or symptoms of sin, rather than the despair involved in the spiritual actuality of sinning.<sup>7</sup>

*Sickness* in particular seems to present an account of self that could rival Hegel’s or Fichte’s in its depth, and it has been widely regarded as the canonical statement of Kierkegaard’s own view. I will argue that this account is really a schematic outline in which several components have to be filled in according to conceptions of will, passion, freedom, and faith found mainly in other pseudonymous works. But given its fame and influence, it is useful to begin with *Sickness*, bearing in mind that Anti-Climacus’s stated purpose is to explain ‘despair’, the horrifying but *free sickness* of spirit (*Aand*) that goes unrecognized among the ills that ‘worldly’ understanding recognizes (SKS11: 124/SUD: 8). In a much-quoted and discussed passage, Anti-Climacus tells us that

A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself, or is the relation’s relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation’s relating itself to itself. (SKS11: 129/SUD: 13)

This is sufficiently complex that some commentators have thought it was intended as a parody of German Idealism (Hannay 1987: 23).<sup>8</sup> Perhaps it is meant partly this way, but this *self-thesis*, as I will call it (‘ST’ for short), is also proposed seriously in two senses. First, it is a rejection of both Aristotelian hylomorphic and substance-dualist accounts of persons as unions or relations of body and mind, which the text calls ‘the psychical and the physical’. Dualist accounts hold that the mind, ‘soul’, or ‘psyche’ is the self (which is also contingently attached to a human body), while hylomorphic accounts hold that the self is the substantial form that is individuated by informing or making function a particular body in a certain segment of space.<sup>9</sup> Anti-Climacus seems to regard the hylomorphic approach, or perhaps a dual aspect approach, as giving the correct account of a *human being* (see Morelli 1995: 18), but not of a person or self:

<sup>7</sup> See Gregory Beabout’s helpful summary of scholarship on the relation between *Sickness* and *Anxiety* (Beabout 1996).

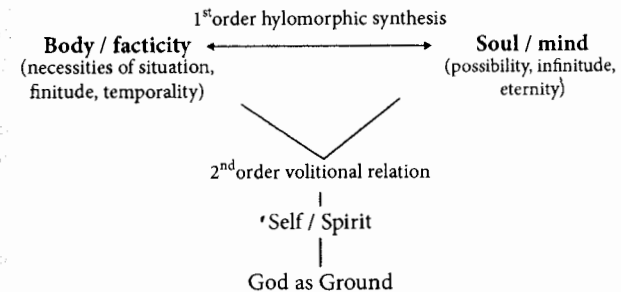
<sup>8</sup> See also the discussion of this passage in Hannay’s chapter ‘Translating Kierkegaard’ in this volume.

<sup>9</sup> For my purposes, this simple gloss suffices, though it leaves aside medieval variations that instead attribute individuation in an individual essence (haecceity) or to a unique species-form for each person. In trying to avoid equating the individuality of a person with the *instantiation* of a universal in particular matter, arguably these variants anticipate the need for an existential conception of the uniqueness of selves.

A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered this way, a human being is still not a self. (SKS11: 129/SUD: 13)

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. Anti-Climacus distinguishes spirit/self from the ‘negative’ unity that subsists at the level of the first-order relation as the tension between its poles: ‘the relation between the psychical and the physical is a [first-order] relation. If, however, the [first] relation relates itself to itself, this relation is the positive third, and this is the self’ (SKS11: 129/SUD: 13).<sup>10</sup>

In other words, the self is a higher-order relation involving the first-order relation (or synthesis). It is not in itself a relation between this first-order relation and a distinct entity, but instead a further ‘positive’ way that the human being constituted by the first-order relation acts on or relates back to its parts or polar aspects. Yet the text immediately adds to the ST that this whole second-order complex is ‘established by another’ and relates itself to that which established the ‘entire [second-order] relation’ (SKS11: 129/SUD: 13). In other words, the self-relation’s third relation to that which grounds its existence is not simply a static ontological dependence, but a dynamic attitude towards that divine basis that varies in connection with variation in spirit’s relation to the poles of ‘soma’ and ‘psyche.’ In simplest schematic terms, we can diagram the proposal as follows:



There have been many helpful scholarly attempts to explain what this self-thesis (ST) means. In labelling the first-order relation, I follow John Glenn’s argument that when

<sup>10</sup> The text is actually more complex, since Anti-Climacus begins this sentence by making sure the reader will not confuse the positive higher-order relation of spirit with any imagined *derivative* ‘relation’ between the first-order relation and its relata. I have left this complication aside.

Anti-Climacus diagnoses several forms of despair as overemphases on one pole or the other, we see that 'finitude' and 'necessity' in human existence do not refer just to material composition in space/time, but to 'involvement in actual situations' of history and culture, including 'a tendency to be absorbed into restrictive social roles.' Similarly, eternity and 'infinite' do not signify 'the possession of an immortal soul' (Glenn 1987: 8). In the first-order relation, Kierkegaard is not repeating the traditional dualism of a mental and physical substance (Glenn 1987: 6–7), and it is the self rather than the 'soul' or psyche that continues in eternity after death.<sup>11</sup> But what is 'spirit'?

As Hannay persuasively argues, Hegel uses 'spirit' (*Geist*) in a sense that goes back at least to Aristotle's *pneuma*, a kind of divine stuff... that preserves the unity of the organism' (Hannay 1987: 27). In this sense, 'spirit' as the animating principle of the body is a dynamic version of 'soul' as its organizing form. And for Hegel, human 'spirit' is the 'end-state' of 'soul' or 'consciousness' in which it attains a rational understanding of itself in relation to world (Hannay 1987: 26). Thus, in rejecting hylomorphism by distinguishing 'spirit' from 'soul' (or mind, reason), Anti-Climacus is implying that the *telos* of personhood transcends that of any animal kind: spirit essentially involves an individualizing relation to God (Hannay 1987: 28). But before we can understand how spirit depends on God, we must first grasp its reflexive work on the human psychophysical relation with its polar qualities.

In one of the earliest detailed English-language analyses, John Elrod says that, by insisting that 'spirit is a positive third element which itself posits' or establishes 'the relation of the dialectically opposing moments,' Kierkegaard distinguishes spirit from the Hegelian sort of negative unity that is supposed to arise necessarily from the two poles (Elrod 1975: 30, 39). Still, this does not mean that spirit is a 'higher power or faculty' of control; instead, along Heideggerian lines, Elrod suggests that 'spirit' operates as 'the structuring principle of the self' by determining the way that the first-order relation is lived: 'the specific structure of each expression of the self as synthesis is determined by the manner in which spirit constitutes and unites the [first-order] relation' (Elrod 1975: 31–2). This implies three levels of specification. While the basic fourfold dialectical polarity of body/soul, finite/infinite, temporal/eternal, and necessity/possibility is the universal ontological framework of any personal identity, these sides or aspects of the

<sup>11</sup> This is implied when Anti-Climacus argues in the Preface that according to Christianity, despair as spiritual 'sickness unto death' does not end in death of the human composite (SKS11: 123–4/SUD: 7–8). It is more explicit when Anti-Climacus adds that the despairing self cannot be rid of itself in mortal demise because the divine power that established the self-relation as the ultimate gift is also an 'eternal claim' or ownership, and thus it 'forces him to be the self he does not want to be' (SKS11: 136–7/SUD: 20–1). The implication here is that suicide committed in a despairing effort to cease being a person leads only to a damned form of personhood. A similar conception of the survival of the self is found in the famous 'Purity of Heart' section of Kierkegaard's discourse, *On the Occasion of a Confession*, and also his discourse *At a Graveside*. Note that (religious) 'eternity' after death is implicitly distinct from (ethical) 'eternity' in the mental pole of the first-order relation. That 'eternity' of spirit is not completely identical to 'eternity' as one pole of the first-order relation agrees with a key distinction in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (see Davenport 2008a: 906).

first-order relation are always balanced or imbalanced in particular ('ontic' or factual) modes that constitute the main types of 'self'. These basic forms of alignment or misalignment of the poles in the first-order relation correspond to Kierkegaard's existential stages. At the third level, one's 'spirit' determines how one lives through these adverbial modes of the first-order relation over time. In Anti-Climacus's analogy, the structure of personhood is like that of a multi-storied house, but people choose to live on different floors, with most preferring the basement (SKS11: 158–9/SUD: 43). Thus the different forms of despair are misrelations of the first-order relation or 'synthesis,' but 'the synthesis is not the misrelation; it is merely the possibility' of a spiritual misrelation (SKS11: 131/SUD 15). So the basic structure of selfhood must be distinguished both from the existential stages or life-views that Anti-Climacus redescribes as forms of despair or faith, and from the concrete way that an individual person manifests one of these spiritual shapes during a period of time.

As a dynamic process of ongoing activity, an individual spirit determines 'how' the first-order relation is lived in two ways according to Elrod. First, spirit provides a certain kind of 'self-consciousness' that is not mere reflective awareness of one's sentience, but instead an 'energizing force' that brings about a productive tension between ideality and reality (mind and world)—a kind of 'interest' in the sides of the first-order relation (Elrod 1975: 50–1).<sup>12</sup> It is this sort of interest, absent in speculative reflection, which makes it possible for the person to become aware of herself as a 'self'. Thus Elrod interprets Kierkegaardian 'self-consciousness' not simply as introspective but as 'the initial effort of the self' to discover itself (Elrod 1975: 53). This reading is supported by Anti-Climacus's Preface where he says that 'Christian knowing' is 'concerned,' and 'Concern [*Bekymringen*] constitutes the relation to life, to the actuality of personality, and therefore earnestness from the Christian point of view' (SKS11: 117/SUD 5–6). Since 'earnestness' is a form of volitional care with repeated dedication (see Davenport 2001b: 276–82), this passage implies that 'self' is the identity that is formed by willed caring, taking an interest. As George Pattison puts it, the 'full self-consciousness' in which self-unity is achieved is not a 'purely experiential understanding' or spectation of oneself, but rather a practical self-awareness gained through 'volitional' resolve (Pattison 1997: 78).

Spirit is an ability or power to move between possibility and necessity. Most interpretations of the ST emphasize this point, for later in *Sickness*, Anti-Climacus refers again to the synthesis of infinitude and finitude and says that even though this relation is 'derived' from the power that establishes it, it 'relates itself to itself, which is freedom. The self is freedom' (SKS11: 145/SUD: 29). It is evident here that the first-order hylomorphic relation is not enough for the freedom that is essential to persons and to their constitutive responsibility for the selves they acquire (which I'll call 'existential freedom'). In a crucial passage, Anti-Climacus says that the second-order relation or spiritual freedom results from God's *withholding control*: despair or misrelation is only possible because

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed development of this insight, see Patrick Stokes' analysis of Kierkegaardian spirit as 'interesse' (Stokes 2010: esp. ch. 3).



... God, who constituted man a relation, *releases it from his hand*, as it were—that is, inasmuch as the relation relates itself to itself. And because the relation is spirit, is the self, upon it rests the responsibility for all [its] despair. (SKS11: 132/SUD: 16, my italics)

In other words, spirit always freely assumes a posture of will; it is as if God creates the potential for self by allowing a human animal to become free in relation to its given psychological and physical features, to make of them an identity conditioned but not determined by this givenness. Though a few passages in *Sickness* may make it sound as if freedom belongs to one pole of the first-order relation (with possibility), in fact the kind of freedom that Anti-Climacus equates with selfhood transcends both poles (see Glenn 1987: 8); thus it cannot simply be negative liberty as the absence of necessity, or what other pseudonymous authors often refer to as 'abstract *liberium arbitrium*' (SKS4: 355/CA: 49). Instead existential freedom is always already interested in its options because it has a *telos*, and those options are always qualified by its history.

### III. THE EXISTENTIAL TELOS: SPIRIT AS 'STRIVING WILL' IN SICKNESS, ANXIETY, AND *EITHER/OR*

Yet this does not explain how 'selfhood' that is equated with the higher-order relation or a 'self' that arises from a specific free response to one human being's first-order relation could give that being a determinate practical identity: what kind of response is it? Or in Elrod's terms, how exactly does 'spirit' as free interest in the world (and in itself) give a particular instance of the first-order relation its specific content? This first-order character shaped by spirit will be historically unique but also exemplify one of the existential stages or basic stances of existence that are possible, given the four basic aspects of the hylomorphic relation. Elrod is surely correct that, for Kierkegaard, existential freedom operates within the limits of an individual's facticity, and (contra Sartre) it either fails to operate or is held in abeyance in the earlier types of aestheticism (Elrod 1975: 58–61). But it is too Heideggerian to say that, for Kierkegaard, this freedom has no *telos* and its only real possibility is 'itself' (Elrod 1975: 56, 64). On the contrary, Anti-Climacus says that every misrelation or imbalance that spirit brings about in the first-order relation also 'reflects itself infinitely in the relation to the power that established it' (SKS11: 130/SUD: 14)—meaning that it (at least tacitly) rebels by refusing to take the shape that it is *meant* to take in accordance with the basic structure<sup>13</sup> established by its creator:

<sup>13</sup> More technically, this means that each particular way that spirit freely relates to the two sides of its first-order object also generates an implicit stance towards the power that constituted it as free, and vice-versa: the way one wills to be oneself or not is *eo ipso* also a way of willing to be what God created one to be or not. This explains why the negative form of despair, 'not to will to be oneself' always

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. (SKS11: 130/SUD: 14)

Thus the ST in *Sickness* includes a statement of the existential *telos* of mortal personhood: 'to will to be the self that he is *in truth*,' i.e. as a created spirit acknowledging its debt to its creator (SKS11: 136/SUD: 20, my italics). This is also the formula for faith: 'the self in being itself and in willing to be itself rests transparently in God.' Thus despair (as sin) includes every form of identity short of faith, as the true opposite of sin (SKS11: 196/SUD: 82). This existential *telos* is not defined as eudaimonia; for happiness is not even a qualification of spirit (SKS11: 141/SUD: 25), though faith may lead to an eternal happiness. To make sense of the ST, we need to understand what 'will' means in these reflexive formulae, including those for the two main forms of despair—'not to will to be oneself, to do away with oneself' and 'in despair to will to be oneself' (SKS11: 130/SUD: 14). As we have seen, 'will' in these formulae, like 'spirit' in the ST, cannot only mean choice that exercises leeway-liberty.

Soon after equating the self with freedom as 'the dialectical aspect of the categories of possibility and necessity,' or that which unites them, Anti-Climacus adds that self-consciousness

... is decisive with regard to the self. The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self. 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. (SKS11: 145/SUD: 29)

The gradation implied here suggests something closer to decisiveness and will-power. Similarly, when Anti-Climacus refers to unreflective aesthetes as lacking 'spirit,' he explains this in terms of being ruled by passive motives: 'The man of immediacy is only psychically qualified' rather than spiritual because he understands his identity only as an adjunct to external objects. 'The self is bound up in immediacy with the other [object] in desiring, craving, enjoying, etc.' (SKS11: 165–6/SUD: 51). This should remind us of Judge William's claim in the second letter of *Either/Or II* that those who live only for satisfaction through success in some external aim all fail to discover their selfhood and a truly unified goal that would give content to their self (SKS3: 177–9/EO2: 182–4). By contrast, the Judge describes the sort of willing on ethical grounds that generates a unified personality as an *internal* investment in the life chosen (SKS3: 160/EO2: 163), which involves a kind of 'self-consciousness' that is only possible to a mind that is 'owned' by a

involves some positive defiance (SKS11: 130/SUD: 14) and likewise why the positive form of despair includes the 'will to be rid of oneself' qua true self (SKS11: 135–6/SUD: 20). Thus '[n]o despair is entirely free of defiance' (the positive form) and yet 'even despair's most extreme defiance is never really free of some weakness' (the negative form) or division in the will (SKS11: 165/SUD: 49). There has been quite a bit of confusion about this in the literature, with Theunissen (2005) arguing that the negative form of despair is basic and Hannay (2002) arguing that the positive form is basic, when in fact each implies the other because each is a way of failing to attain a *telos* that involves all three relations in the basic self-structure—a discord in any one of which prevents the others from taking their proper form.

will (a psyche directed by spirit).<sup>14</sup> In his first letter, the Judge calls it 'the energy of the will' (SKS3: 34/EO2: 26) seen, for example, in the love filled with 'vigorous and vital conviction' that is essential to an authentic marriage-commitment (SKS3: 40/EO2: 32).

These points all suggest that 'spirit' in the pseudonymous works stands for 'willing' in a distinctively *self-motivational* sense: it is a capacity for *determined resolve* that unites the agent's energies. It involves alternative possibilities but also a positive control over her plans, purposes, and even final ends.<sup>15</sup> 'Will' in this sense is a '*nisus formativus*' (SKS3: 198/EO2: 206) or formative 'striving' (SKS8: 160/UDVS: 49) involving effort (see Hannay, 1997, 64–5). Thus Kierkegaard often uses metaphors of *passion* for it, but it differs from all motives (such as basic appetites and inclinations) that arise passively from our animal nature and contingent situations, including involuntary emotions. It refers not to 'will in the sense of desire' but rather to 'will in the noble sense of freedom' (SKS8: 219/UDVS: 117). Such volitional passion is at least procedurally autonomous without needing any separate endorsement (it carries the agent's authority within it inherently).

A person's 'spirit' in this sense can synthesize 'body' and 'soul' in different ways, responding creatively to physical and psychical givens. By freely setting a goal and striving towards it, the movement of spirit provides the basis for all one's more derivative attitudes and emotions towards values in actual and possible events in life, social roles, interpersonal relations, and one's own given or acquired characteristics. In other words, spirit is motive-shaping will that has as its *telos* a unified stance towards life. However, most volitional commitments cannot sustain such unity. For example, if a man wills mystical transcendence of the temporal, he 'chooses himself abstractly' or tries to be pure freedom without accepting responsibility to make a concrete identity out of his animality (SKS3: 236–7/EO2: 247–8). Anti-Climacus describes such willing as 'fantastic' in a way that subtly avoids the earnest work involved in genuine spiritual devotion, which is 'personally present and contemporary... in the small part of the task that can be carried out at once' (SKS11: 147–8/SUD: 32). The fantastic agent avoids the concrete duty by bluster and grand plans rather than beginning the prosaic first steps actually required. Or she loses her 'self' in superficial business with worldly matters to avoid having to consider directly its eternal task (SKS11: 147–8/SUD: 32). By contrast, spirit balances the eternal and temporal in ethically qualified willing: 'the I chooses itself, or more correctly, receives itself', including the 'esthetic' details of one's facticity (SKS3: 160/EO2: 177). This self-reception is not instantaneous, but repeated; through it, the agent 'gain[s] a history' (SKS3: 239/EO2: 250) or gives continuity to his identity as

<sup>14</sup> It is important that human 'will' in Kierkegaard's sense also aims at outward objects in the sense of goods beyond the self, but it does so with a kind of reflexivity that transcends the goal's possible appeal to appetite or inclination. It is this dependence on the attractiveness of the end-object that makes 'aesthetic' motivation more passive: like Kant, Judge William sees these desires as rooted ultimately in animal self-interest.

<sup>15</sup> This is what I have called 'striving will' to indicate its ongoing and effortful quality; my Heidegger-inspired term 'projective motivation' distinguishes motives that are actively worked up and/or sustained by the agent rather than passively arising as various appetites and inclinations motivate us prior to any consent from us: see Davenport 2007. See Davenport 2001a for an argument that Kierkegaard understands willing as free projective striving in the *Concept of Anxiety*.

...this specific individual with these capacities, these inclinations, these drives, these passions, influenced by this specific social milieu, as this specific product of a specific environment. (SKS3: 239/EO2: 251)

These are all aspects of the first-order relation in Anti-Climacus's account, and a human being gains a self by accepting their reality but organizing its various aspects towards deeper purposes, adjusting her first-order traits to ends formed and sustained by her striving will. There is an apparent paradox here, and the Judge plays with both sides of it: the 'self' in its abstract aspect is 'freedom' or the leeway to respond to first-order features (the liberty that operates in the second-order relation); yet it is also the *concrete* 'self' that results from this work, that 'comes into existence through the choice' of the self as 'free spirit' (SKS3: 206–7/EO2: 214–15; compare SKS3: 172–3/EO2: 177). Though spirit is freedom, the agent finds that 'the self that he has chosen has a boundless multiplicity within itself in that it has a history', including good and bad aspects (SKS3: 207/EO2: 216). So the facticity of the first-order relation, which the Judge calls the 'immediacy' of 'accidental characteristics' (SKS3: 244/EO2: 256), is a kind of material base for spirit's operation. The self arises from the effort to put these elements in a thematic order in time, gestalting them in line with a 'view of life in accordance with which he wants to shape his life' (SKS8: 166/UDVS: 56). Without this volitional effort, the Judge says that the aesthetic young man only displays his talents in the moment without integrating purpose: 'for that reason, your life disintegrates, and it is impossible for you to explain it' (SKS3: 175/EO2: 179). Similarly, albeit without fault, a pure spirit without facticity accumulating over time cannot have a narrative development of personality: 'therefore an angel has no history' (SKS4: 354/CA: 49; compare SKS3: 172/EO2: 176).

Thus the two levels of relation in Anti-Climacus's account help make sense of the Judge's apparent paradox of self-creation/reception.<sup>16</sup> Kierkegaard's most authoritative pseudonym is in deep agreement with Judge William that the basic function of will in the 'spirit' sense is passionate resolve, a freely sustained effort that works on the first-order relation(s) that make up an instance of the *homo sapiens* species, and the result is the practical identity of a self (as opposed to a completely non-autonomous body-psyche composite in a very young human child or of a non-human sentient animal). Thus it is through spirited willing that the person gains a 'self' in the sense of a 'character' for which she is deeply responsible. As Hannay argues, a 'self' in Anti-Climacus's sense cannot arise merely from control of circumstances so their interaction with one factual nature produces interest; a *self-forming* choice must look 'inwards' to the whole character of one's life and the 'goal or telos' of personal existence (Hannay, 1998, 336–8). This significance of 'spirit' is probably clearest in the contrasts we find in *Either/Or*, *Sickness*, *Postscript* and other pseudonymous works between the existential 'stages' of aesthetic detachment and ethical commitment. In discussing how different types of despair are subjectively experienced (Part I, C (b)) as opposed to their objective structure (I, C (a)), Anti-Climacus dis-

<sup>16</sup> Compare the paradoxical statements about choosing and positing at EO2: 213: something (objective facticity) has to be there for me to choose it, yet something else is created by choosing (subjective appropriation).

tinguishes two levels of 'spiritlessness' that both involve ignorance of being in despair: 'the state of thoroughgoing moribundity, a merely vegetative life, or an intense, energetic life' that is still in secret despair (SKS11: 169/SUD: 45). The first is listless disinterest, and the second is superficial busyness without any deep commitment to challenging ends or noble ideals (heroism). Similarly, the Judge says that different aesthetic stances (or sub-stages) range from 'total absence of spirit to the highest level of brilliance' in use of great talent; but in all these stances, 'spirit is not qualified as spirit' (SKS3: 176/EO2: 180-1), since it has not deliberately made use of its power to set ends and strive for them. In such stances, a human being follows the lead of contingent features in his first-order relation, using his strengths and opportunities given by his situation, but does not work on his first-order composite for the sake of any higher unifying goal.

This distinction is linked to a developmental picture. While human beings naturally begin in a form of 'aesthetic' ignorance that corresponds to Adam's innocence before the fall (SKS4: 343/CA: 37), or a 'state' close to pure hylomorphic animality, our existential *telos* asserts itself in spirit's desire to awaken—what Viktor Frankl called the 'will to meaning' (Frankl 1969). Because selfhood is our destiny, the Judge says, 'There comes a moment in a person's life when immediacy is ripe, so to speak, and the spirit requires a higher form, when it wants to lay hold of itself as spirit' (SKS3: 183/EO2: 188). At this point of pregnancy, if spirit is suppressed by an effort to remain care-free and uncommitted, it becomes distorted by a sense of meaninglessness, as we see in Nero. Though the Judge calls this 'hysteria of the spirit' a kind of depression (SKS3: 183/EO2: 188; compare SKS3: 180/EO2: 185), he does not mean clinical depression in our contemporary sense. He has in mind an existential version of the vice of *acedia*: 'it is the sin of not willing deeply and inwardly, and this is the mother of all sins' (SKS3: 183/EO2: 189). In other words, spirit holds back from performing its transcendent function, which is to engage striving will; it seeks escape by dispersion rather than unity of new purpose followed by patient continuity. And this repression leads to a sense of despair (SKS3: 196-7/EO2: 204). We might call this a 'proto-vice' because it blocks spirit from becoming deeply responsible for any definite self.

This 'hysteria' of spirit suppressed in fear of acquiring ethical obligation through serious life-purpose may sound similar to Haufniensis's description of 'anxiety' in the innocence prior to first sin (SKS4: 347/CA: 41). But the anguish of Nero or the young man 'A' in *Either/Or I* is not the default anxiety of childhood as a 'dreaming of the spirit'; it is a deeper anxiety compounded by a spiritual stalling after spirit tries to awaken, a 'melancholy at a much later point' of self-enclosure (SKS4: 348/CA: 42-3, and see 43 note \*). Instead, the initial anxiety of Adam or of children whose spirit is awakening to the 'infinite possibility of being able' to will and thus become responsible (SKS4: 350/CA: 45) corresponds to the point where the ethical modes of existence first becomes salient as an alternative to the default aesthetic stance.<sup>17</sup> Haufniensis equates this

<sup>17</sup> This does not mean that the alternative rises to salience as *articulated* in ethical terms. Haufniensis emphasizes that such innocents do not know *what* they are 'able' to do, and so cannot conceive it as a choice 'between good and evil' (SKS4: 350/CA: 45). Originary anxiety is pure

primordial anxiety with our first awareness of 'spirit' as something more than 'body and soul', something that 'disturbs' our given or default relationship because we are not mere animals (SKS4: 348-49/CA: 43-4). He offers right here a first draft of Anti-Climacus's ST: 'Man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical' but their unity depends on a third, which 'is spirit' (SKS4: 348/CA: 43). Following the Judge, he also adds that the first-order relation 'has persistence' in time, but it 'does not have endurance' without receiving this from spirit (SKS4: 349/CA: 44). 'Endurance' refers to the historical or narrative continuity of a concrete identity through willed repetition of commitment to a 'life-view' (SKS3: 175/EO2: 179), which Climacus calls the earnestness of 'ethical striving' (SKS7: 129-30/CUP: 138-9).

Thus the clues in *Anxiety* are helpful for relating the Judge's ideas to Anti-Climacus's claim that when we are aware only of our 'psychical-physical synthesis' and live 'unaware of being defined by spirit', we are haunted by a subliminal sense that something crucial is missing, however happy we are. In this sense, 'all immediacy is anxiety' (SKS11: 141/SUD: 25). Similarly, when the Judge says that spirit wants to awaken and 'to gather itself together' out of the 'dispersion' of immediacy (SKS3: 183/EO2: 189), he refers to the motivational manifestation of our existential *telos*: we feel called to form an active second-order relation to the animal givens of our human form—a relation that transcends our natural kind. But such a self-appropriation is the Judge's famous 'choice' to become a serious chooser who decides in ethical terms (SKS3: 165-6/EO2: 169). This idea of a choice that moves us from the aesthetic to the ethical stage has occasioned much controversy and confusion because it is easy to misunderstand the Judge's claim that in this basic choice, what matters is 'not so much to choose the right thing as the energy, the earnestness, and the pathos with which one chooses' (SKS3: 164/EO2: 167). With Haufniensis's help, we see that this choice is not groundless but instead encouraged by existential anxiety. With Anti-Climacus's help, we see that this basic 'choice' refers to willing in the self-motivational sense, i.e. the power to set new ends and strive through repeated effort. The Judge is not offering a voluntarist account of ethical norms as arbitrarily selected among options, as if we deign to accept their authority in a decision not governed by any authority; on the contrary, as Pattison notes, there is an 'aprioristic character' in much of Kierkegaard's comments on the content of ethics (Pattison 2005: 129). Rather, the Judge means that volitional commitment will quicken conscience<sup>18</sup> by making salient the ethical aspects of one's dedication to positive goals involving social life—a pursuit that reorders the elements of one's body-soul composite

apprehension of the *how* of existential freedom, the ability or potential of striving will. Thus it appears that the model for the Judge's primordial 'choice' between the aesthetic and ethical is constructed in *Either/Or II* to mirror the idea of innocent agency prior to knowledge of *both* good and evil in *Genesis*: see Davenport 2001c.

<sup>18</sup> The complex theme of 'conscience' is developed at length in *Works of Love* and several *Upbuilding Discourses* (e.g. see SKS8: 227-30/UDVS: 127-31 and SKS9: 137-54/WL: 135-53). On the distinction between 'ethics as moral and social theory' for temporal institutions versus the 'genuine ethics' of 'absolute contrasts' that furnishes the eternal basis for self-forming choice, see Malantschuck 1971: 83-6.

towards new ends. Because such striving does not come from given aspects of the immediate first-order relation, we take active ownership of it. Anti-Climacus agrees that in choosing we become aware of ourselves, and that by 'venturing' in the spiritual sense, or willing something positive beyond the defaults in my first-order relations, 'life helps me by punishing me' if I will wrongly (SKS11: 150/SUD: 34). This clearly echoes the Judge's thesis that sincerity of volitional resolve and effort are more likely to make me aware of eternal ethical requirements than is a life of spiritual hollowness or 'quiet lostness' without striving will (SKS3: 165/EO2: 167-8).

However, there are limits to the Judge's analysis. Later pseudonymous and signed works distinguish another kind of aesthetic 'lostness' that is not the anxiety of initial innocence, or the uncomprehending hysteria of self-repressed spirit, nor even the more reflective and 'hardened' distancing of the young man A (SKS3: 223/EO2: 233). Instead, human beings become aware of spirit but then try to silence it by attaching themselves to others to avoid any spiritual effort and thus to escape anxiety.<sup>19</sup> Each loses herself in phantom camaraderie of inquisitiveness without resolve, idle 'chatter' and 'garrulous confiding' that makes them feel included in groups with no real purpose, topped with 'snobbish self-satisfaction' in demeaning any earnest effort as folly (SKS8: 92-4/TA: 97-9, 105-65). This attitude is a kind of cynicism that substitutes reflective 'ambiguity and equivocation' for willing anything (SKS8: 77/TA: 80). The will's natural energy is not just divided but dispersed in a compounded 'multifarious double-mindedness' (SKS8: 173/UDVS: 64)—the self's identity is reduced to a mere chameleon, taking on whatever colour is most advantageous in each situation. Anti-Climacus describes this kind of despair as an immersion in 'finitude' in contrast with the loss of self in infinite abstraction (e.g. in mysticism):

... another kind of despair seems to permit itself to be tricked out of its self by 'the others.' Surrounded by hordes of men, absorbed in all sorts of secular matters, more and more shrewd about the ways of the world—such a person forgets himself, forgets even his own name divinely understood, does not dare believe in himself, finds it easier and safer to be like others, to become a copy, a number, a mass man. (SKS11: 149/SUD: 33-4)

This is the nadir of aestheticism, the lowest form of failing to will to be oneself. In this form, individuality is lost; the rough rock of facticity that should be shaped into a fine-cut gem by the will becomes 'smooth as a rolling stone' (SKS11: 150/SUD: 34); the higher-order relation is obscured. Anti-Climacus sums this up by saying that people may appear successful in the temporal world but 'spiritually speaking they have no self, no self for whose sake they could venture everything, no self before God' (SKS11: 151/SUD: 35). To understand this, we have to move beyond the Judge's analysis to the religious dimension of the self as indicated in the last part of Anti-Climacus's formula.

<sup>19</sup> Compare Anti-Climacus's remark that ancient paganism lacked spirit but through initial anxiety was still qualified in the direction of spirit, 'whereas paganism in Christendom lacks spirit in departure from spirit... and therefore is spiritlessness in the strictest sense' (SKS11: 162/SUD: 47). This second paganism of Christendom is very similar to shrewd multifariousness.

#### IV. 'SELF' IN THE RELIGIOUS SENSE

The analysis so far suggests close agreement between Kierkegaard's pseudonymous and signed works once we understand aestheticism as lack of spirit<sup>20</sup> and spirit as striving will. But ethically qualified identity wrought through volitional response to the body-soul composite is not complete, in Kierkegaard's view. Anti-Climacus is able to give a deeper explanation of the way conscience is quickened by earnest willing than Judge William can, for the model of selfhood in *Sickness* implies that an active self-relation will always include an implicit attitude towards the power that founded my will (SKS11: 130/SUD: 14). This is why both spirits dissolved in finitude's multiplicity and those fleeing into abstract infinity constitute no self 'before God' (SKS11: 148/SUD: 32): they are not aware of the God-relation because as yet they have no positive or definite second-order relation to their animality expressed in infinite commitment. It seems that in this sense, 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 (SKS11: 143-4/SUD: 27-8). Thus, as Pattison stresses, to have an identity 'before God' is not a cognitive relationship: it is not to know a divine entity or to understand oneself as known by divine being (Pattison 1997: 82). It is a shift in attitude that regestalts our ethical consciousness. The self-making function of spiritual willing stands out most sharply in a religious frame of reference because only in faith that affirms its debt to its creator does the self 'rest transparently' on its true ground and through the volitional second-order relation shape its identity in a way that accords with the transcendent ground of its being.

The God-relation also explains the existential *telos* of a deep identity that is distinct from all other persons not just numerically, nor even because of the unique way it can work on its body-soul composite, as the Judge suggests. Kierkegaard holds that, beyond this universal imperative to acquire an ethically significant character (SKS8: 75/TA: 77-8), our existential *telos* is individualized: 'at every person's birth there comes into existence an eternal purpose for that person, for that person in particular' (SKS8: 198/UDVS: 93). In other words, beyond our universal ethical obligations, there is something that only you can do, a potential that is uniquely yours in the web of providence. This explains part of Anti-Climacus's meaning when he says

Every human being is primitively intended to be a self, destined to become himself, and as such every self is certainly angular, but that only means that is to be ground into shape, not that it is to be ground down smooth, not that it is to utterly abandon being itself out of fear of men, or... not to dare to be itself in its more essential contingency. (SKS11: 148/SUD: 33)

<sup>20</sup> Note Haufniensis's telling argument that 'When beauty must reign... spirit is excluded' and anxiety thus haunts this life-view (SKS4: 369/CA: 65).

As we saw, the stone analogy suggests that our unique potential is nascent in our particular contingencies, our 'angles'. Volitional shaping makes them fit together in a pattern, rather than depriving us of the unique potential in our given facticity. In this light, 'faithfulness to oneself' is faithfulness to our God-given vocation. Faith that we have a distinctive purpose and humble effort to discover it is part of what it means for the self to 'rest transparently' in the power that established it (SKS11: 130/SUD: 14).<sup>21</sup> For this power establishes a self as individual by giving it both its own-most singular task and the freedom to shape a self in accordance with it or not. This also sheds light on why 'choosing to live "as if before God" is not quite the same as living by a set of principles'; it is instead to feel personally addressed by a call that is attuned to 'each twist and turn in our moral journey' (Pattison 2005: 131) or life narrative.

The uniqueness of a self in these connected ethical and religious senses is opposed both to abstraction or flight into endless unactualized possibility and to being governed entirely by one's facticity—for example, by letting talents and opportunity direct all one's decisions, by uncritically following customary mores, or by mindlessly conforming to social trends. The Judge contrasts both these forms of inauthenticity with the basic choice in which a human agent first 'chooses himself in his eternal validity' (SKS3: 203/EO2: 211). The basic choice in which the 'difference between good and evil' first emerges from latency to full significance for me is characterized by spirit breaking through to pervade my whole aesthetic identity through an 'absolute choice of myself' (SKS3: 214/EO2: 223–4); this is the fundamental affirmation of my will's infinite value, given my potential to become a specific self.<sup>22</sup> For the Judge, this affirmation of self that forms the self-relation is possible because in it, 'a person links himself to an eternal power' that makes him eternally 'conscious of himself as the person he is' (SKS3: 198/EO2: 206). This basis on which the self arises is the eternal ethical standard, so that spiritual self-awareness is conscience. This sense of responsibility for his identity is also an eternal basis for the self in the sense that it remains to him even if all else fails, and every outward effort is thwarted by fortune (SKS3: 241/EO2: 253).

Yet for Anti-Climacus, this eternal basis is a personal God, a creator who gives each of us a unique potential latent in our first-order psychosomatic relation and life-situations. He writes that anyone who 'does not rest transparently in God but vaguely rests in and merges in some abstract universality (state, nation)' or who is unaware that their powers have any transcendent source is in despair (SKS11: 169/SUD: 46). Recognizing that we can do nothing without God qualifies the autonomy or spiritual self-direction that the Judge describes. Our capacity for founded, moderate autonomy is established by God's withholding direct control to give us freedom: this 'infinite concession' that creates us in God's own image as free spirits is also a relation that *preserves* the self in its self-structure even if it refuses to affirm itself either as free or as indebted to God (SKS11: 136–7/SUD: 21).

<sup>21</sup> For a helpful discussion of this idea and the way that individual vocation fits with universal agapic duties, see Evans 2004: 170–9.

<sup>22</sup> Compare Heidegger's notion of self's ultimate end or constitutive goal as its 'for the sake of which' [*Worumwillen*] in Heidegger 1962: 116–22.

Thus the constitution of finite spirit necessarily includes a kind of divine *appropriation of created freedom*—a paradox that demands a *free* relation of love towards one's origin in divine love. This is what our existential *telos*—to become our self—actually requires as our highest duty.

How can we make sense of Anti-Climacus's claim that this opposite of despair, which he describes as resting transparently in God, 'is also the formula for faith' (SKS11: 164/SUD: 49)? In *Fear and Trembling*, religious faith is portrayed as a trust, based on revealed promise that the ethical ideal will be fulfilled by God even when it appears entirely beyond our mortal powers, and no rational evidence suggests that it is possible (such as Isaac still living to father a great nation despite being sacrificed by his father as commanded). Faith in this sense is staking one's whole identity on trust in promised eschatological goods.<sup>23</sup> As Anti-Climacus puts it in discussing the despair that lacks possibility, 'What is decisive is that with God, everything is possible', even in extreme circumstances where 'humanly speaking, there is no possibility' (SKS11: 153–4/SUD: 38). In such cases, a self without faith collapses under the weight of terrible events (SKS11: 156/SUD: 41), while the self trusting absolutely in God is upheld but in some way that transcends rational prediction: 'unexpectedly, miraculously, divinely, help does come' (SKS11: 155/SUD: 39).

Thus faith as eschatological trust is essential for completion of our created self, or fulfilment of our existential *telos*, as becomes clearer in the more advanced forms of despair. As we have seen, the lowest forms are 'misrelations' of the self in whom the will is not actively engaged in shaping the body–soul composite. In the more developed forms, there is a consciousness of the eternal potential for a self, and thus awareness of despair (SKS11: 162/SUD: 47). Among these, 'weakness' or despair as *not* willing to be one's full self (SKS11: 165/SUD: 49) includes agents who can distinguish themselves from some of their 'externalities' and effectiveness in the world, but who cannot accept a 'total break with immediacy' (SKS11: 170/SUD: 55)—which Johannes *de silentio*, the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling*, called 'infinite resignation'. Such agents thus lack the volitional precondition for faith. Beyond these, we find agents who despair consciously over their factual identities and their dependence on earthly goods, even to the point of despairing over their spiritual capacity to overcome despair, but who do not muster faith in divine assistance (SKS11: 176/SUD: 61–2). This hatred of one's weakness that clings to a self-as-failure rather than turning to God is the state of 'inclosing reserve' that keeps the self locked up without help (SKS11: 177/SUD: 63), because, despite acknowledging its weakness, it is too proud to accept help from the source of miraculous possibility (see Morelli 1995: 22–3).

The spiritual paralysis of inclosing reserve leads us to forms of despair in which the will is *directly* misrelated to the transcendent ground that makes its reflexive attitudes and efforts possible. Anti-Climacus distinguishes three types of despair in which spirit wills to be its self without God (rather than its true self), which we could call (a) Stoic autarky or absolute independence, (b) defiant self-martyrdom, and (c) spiteful hatred of

<sup>23</sup> See Davenport 2008a and 2008b.

God for creating us. The stoical spirit wills the 'infinite form' of the higher-order relation (freedom and projective willing) to be the sole basis of its self independent of its divine *telos*, and thus 'wants to be master of itself or to create itself' by perseverance towards an ideal without integrating the given aspects of its psychophysical relation (SKS11: 182/SUD: 68). In this form, spirit shows willpower and negative freedom but rejects any *basis* for its choices either in universal ethical obligation or in its facticity as a unique calling: the Stoic agent 'does not want to see his given self as his task' (SKS11: 182/SUD: 68). But since human willing cannot by itself 'bestow infinite interest and significance upon his enterprises,' his choices become *arbitrary* and must lack the staying power of 'earnestness' (SKS11: 182-3/SUD: 69). In short, this form of the self fails because spirit attempts to achieve absolute autonomy, rather than the modest founded autonomy that the structure of human selfhood implies.

In the case of self-martyrdom (my label), the rejection of faith is more direct. Having discovered some factual flaw that is an obstacle to her planned identity, the agent resigns herself to it but is 'unwilling to hope in the possibility that an earthly need, a temporal cross, can come to an end' (SKS11: 184/SUD: 70). This attitude is similar to despair in weakness due to lacking possibility, and to inclosing reserve, but it is worse because the agent is so offended at needing aid that he explicitly rebels against divine grace, preferring to identify wholly with his flaw: 'Hope... especially by virtue of the absurd, that for God everything is possible—no, that he does not want... he prefers, if necessary, to be himself with all the agonies of hell' (SKS11: 185/SUD: 71). Whereas the merely enclosed agent is unable to accept her need for grace, the self-martyr recognizes this need and defiantly rejects the eschatological promise, willing instead to be a wronged victim of God (SKS11: 185-6/SUD: 72). Similarly, the spirit that wills to be his flawed self to spite God does not simply 'want to tear itself loose from the power that established it,' but instead focuses on God in order to hate God's creation, to use himself as evidence against God (SKS11: 187/SUD: 73).

This final kind of religious despair is thus a sort of absolute rebellion against the self-structure in two of its main respects—its facticity (including flaws) and its dependence on God. The frighteningly convincing description of these more advanced types of despair helps Anti-Climacus show that the freedom and willpower of spirit are not enough by themselves to make a fully stable and meaningful self that is able to affirm its reality in a secure way over time. To achieve this—or to avoid despair—requires affirming and integrating through spiritual work the full structure of created personhood. This includes the power of the second-order relation to transcend and reshape (to some extent) the factual givens of the physical-psychical synthesis. But this power that distinguishes persons from mere animals does not live by and from itself alone. Instead, it is an intermediary. On the one side, it must invest itself in the temporal manifold of life as a human social animal; and on the other side, it must strive towards a distinctive concrete identity that fulfils its potential by drawing on the eternal Spirit that is the source of all created spirit. For only this source enables the commitment or 'infinite boundedness' that makes choice significant, or makes positive freedom possible (SKS9: 150/WL: 149). This power, which I have characterized formally as striving will gifted with libertarian freedom, is according to Kierkegaard manifested most purely in types of agapic love,

which saves from despair (SKS9: 47/WL: 40). He holds that all human love springs from a hidden divine source within us, 'a place in a person's innermost being' that we cannot see or master (SKS9: 16-17/WL: 8-9). This is the ethical meaning of the divine ground of the self-structure: in loving our neighbour, we are resting transparently on the ultimate ground that is absolute Love. This connection is often overlooked because Anti-Climacus's self-formula is so abstract compared to the specific expressions of love that Kierkegaard explores in his own name. But in fact, they affirm the same thing: authentic relation to self (or proper self-love) depends on authentic relation to God (or proper love of God through faith), which are both expressed in willed love of our neighbours.

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