

The Existential Relation of Mood and Self in Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death*¹

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Introductory Remarks

It is becoming increasingly understood that emotions and moods are integral to selfhood. This trend owes much to the work of Danish philosopher Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813–1855).

As well as for his rejection of the Danish Lutheran Church, Kierkegaard became known for his critiques of Romanticism and of Hegel, against whose vision of Absolutist totality Kierkegaard cast his philosophy of the subjective individual. His studies of moods went against the tradition and took an aspect of profound philosophical import. Kierkegaard's study of mood went against the tradition and took an aspect of profound philosophical import. In Kierkegaard's writings the affects can be seen as cognitive

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¹ This paper is first in a series of four on the existential analysis of the relation of mood and self. The four essays are written towards the unity of a book on mood in Existentialism.

estimations, moral judgements, and living evaluations of the world and its meanings. For Kierkegaard the individual's lived experience and history of self-interpretation were key to understanding his or her emotional experience. As one commentator writes: 'The individual's feelings of distress, anxiety, boredom, alienation, love, sympathy and so on, are manifestations of the personal and private apprehensions the individual has made of the world. As such, emotions are emblematic of the individual's understanding of self, others and the social milieu.'² Emotions were seen by Kierkegaard as stances that are world-defining and self-defining.

Throughout Kierkegaard's writings we confront moods and emotional attitudes. Melancholy is entwined with pleasure. Anxiety is mixed with dizzying thrills. Fear and trembling accompany faith. Despair becomes a ghostly state haunting the shadow of one's self. Irony is no longer a style of discourse but a mood aiming towards the transcendent and regarding everything mundane with disappointed bitterness. Kierkegaard's descriptions of the moody passion of existence are deeply involved with his guiding edifying principle: 'choose yourself!' The new Delphic command, this time hailing from Denmark, transforms the epistemic imperative demanding self-knowledge into the more active challenge of being wilfully related to oneself through deliberate and impassioned choice. Kierkegaard sees his new formula of passionate self-relation as inextricably bound to the notion of the self as a spirited self-possession whereby the individual - as a living relationship to family, others, the earth, business matters, myths and so on

² Finkelstein, J., 'Considerations for a sociology of the emotions'. *Studies in Symbolic Interactionism*. (3), p.119.

- in his relating to his or her life and world relates also to this relating itself. The moment of this reflexive relation is for Kierkegaard the moment of choice, the moment when one grasps his or her life and is thus in a position to take control or to let go. Letting go would be to try to continue as one was before the initial self-relation: to attempt a sort of somnambulant existence. But everything is changed once one, like Adam having eaten fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, has related to himself or herself such that responsibility for one's existence has been revealed. The moment cannot be forgotten. The refusal to be oneself requires great effort and is indeed an ultimately doomed feat. The self, Kierkegaard announces, will not relinquish its hold on the individual and despair ensues.

Kierkegaard's language includes references to the eternal, the infinite, the Constituting Power. His dialectics seem like mirrors reflecting mirrors, relations become terms; terms become relations. We will focus on *The Sickness Unto Death* (*Sygdommen til Døden*), a work concerned with the analysis of despair and its essential involvement with the self, in order to explore Kierkegaard's understanding of how mood and self were related. Most of Kierkegaard's works were written by pseudonymous characters, some of whom were aesthetes, some ethical and some religious. *The Sickness Unto Death* is written through the highly religious character of Anti-Climacus. In this work, despair is revealed as a spiritual phenomenon. The aim of the book is the attainment of Christian heroism: "to venture wholly to be oneself, as an individual man, alone before the face of God, alone in this tremendous exertion and tremendous responsibility."

Kierkegaard's emphasis was on the metaphysical understanding of the emotional self as mysteriously related to the eternal, to the infinite and to what he called the Constituting Power (Kierkegaard's term for *Deus sive Natura*). Before Kierkegaard philosophers generally considered emotions as passive, purely irrational and transient interruptions of rational consciousness. He has given us much food for thought, but his work also points out how little we know about emotions and how little we understand ourselves. The very linguistic style we use in approaching qualitative phenomena, emotions and moods can unthinkingly occlude their most important aspects. To discuss qualitative phenomena in a blasé manner - boldly confident that axiomatic, analytic, poetic or whatever style of thinking that one brings to the field is a style sufficient to understanding moods and their significance - is to fail to be open to existence. We barely understand the conceptual structure of emotion, although we are advancing slowly, perhaps with thanks the cognitive revolution in psychology. But with this psychological revolution we may be at risk of thinking of emotion as a sub-species of cognition. Focus on the role of emotional attunement in our relations to self and world is needed if existence is not to be denuded of value. Philosophy always begins in wonder and it is a constant source of wonder that we, who are indeed, in most respects, ourselves, understand so very little who - and even that - we are.

Unity of Spirit in Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard relates the diverse forces, passions, thoughts, hopes, fears,

accidents and essentials that characterise a life to each other and into the unifying concept of spirit. In this vision, human forces and qualities tend towards opposing directions: some impressed with the stamp of the finite, the necessary and the temporal, others soaring in the infinities of freedom, possibility and the eternal. Within the infinite category, in Kierkegaard's somewhat poetic sense, lie the imagined and the hoped for; lie beauty, faith, the relation to God and truth. Thus far, despite relating to the finite and the infinite, we have not yet reached spirit. In the terminology that Sartre, borrowing from Hegel, would later use, the relations between the finite and the infinite constitute only an *en-soi* (in-itself) being and are not sufficient for the existence of a *pour-soi* (for-itself) modality of being. An *en-soi* being is not existential; it is not a being that is lived as self-determining and self-relating. The relations to the finite and the infinite stretch the soul hither and thither comprising its impressions and its realms. What transforms this stretching into spirit is the self-relation of this relation between finite and infinite, between the factual and the transcendent, the temporal and the eternal. The self-relating of the very relation between the poles of necessity and possibility, temporality and eternity, finitude and infinity is the beginning of spirit.

Kierkegaard's writings commend a progression from the aesthetic stage via the ethical to the religious that is neither an Hegelian unfolding nor the natural growth from bud through flower to fruit: it requires that one choose and make the leap of faith. Anti-Climacus' talk of the 'self-relating of the relation' between the poles of necessity and possibility does sound Hegelian, it could almost have been lifted directly from Hegel's *Science of*

Logic. Anti-Climacus indeed implies that a qualitative *Aufhebung*³ or sublation occurs when the relation between the necessary and the possible relates also to itself. This mereological jump is one from a simple relation between two poles towards a wholeness that is more fully self-conscious in its freedom while aware of its finitude. This is what Anti-Climacus calls 'spirit' and what Sartre would term *pour-soi* existence. When the relation between the necessary and the possible in a person also relates to itself, the individual comes of age insofar as he or she is then responsible for any imbalance in the relation between the necessary and the possible. Through exploring Kierkegaard's understanding of the individual's self-relation via despair's vicissitudes of wanting and not wanting to be oneself, we will be in a better position to reflect on what it means for the self to be that in the relation to possibility and necessity which relates back to itself as that very relating.

Anti-Climacus often uses the terms of finitude and infinitude as shorthand for the poles of necessity and possibility, which he also sometimes calls freedom, and of temporality and atemporality/eternity. Kierkegaard gives his reader the impression that the passion of human existence is not lived only within psychological bounds, but that the individual lives a metaphysical relation between the finite and the infinite⁴. Here is another parallel with Sartre's existential philosophy: for Sartre human existence occurs as a self-conscious freedom living in a dynamic relation to its own

³ This is Hegel's term for the higher synthesis of thesis and anti-thesis.

⁴ See Wyschogrod, M. *Kierkegaard and Heidegger*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1954, pp.25-33.

facticity and to its own transcendence.

The self-relating alluded to by Anti-Climacus is the living out of one's own life: the enjoyment and suffering of the relation, but also the undertaking of the advancement of this relation, comprise what Kierkegaard called 'existence'⁵. This spirited existence may be refused or chosen. This is what Kierkegaard emphasised when he noted that, "The biggest danger, that of losing oneself, can pass off in the world as quietly as if it were nothing; every other loss, an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc., is bound to be noticed."⁶ 'Choose yourself!'⁷ Kierkegaard urges. He urges us to literally choose ourselves into existence. The crucial point here is that we can elect to be ourselves as authentic subjects, or we can forestall this choice (which amounts to choosing not to choose) by either remaining within the aesthetic mode and being subject to its mood swings and ultimately melancholic nihilism, or by living not as an authentic self but as though one were somebody else: as though one were, of necessity, an important somebody (a *somebody* in the City, a *somebody* in society, etc.), or as though one simply had to follow universal moral precepts and codes. This focus on authenticity and choosing to be oneself was the inspiration for Heidegger's critique of *das Man*, of the inauthentic mode of 'doing what *one* does in the way that *one* does it' rather than following the call to authenticity. Kierkegaard's call to 'Choose yourself!' also is heard in Sartre's critique of 'the spirit of seriousness', the bourgeois belief that values are fixed and

⁵ See Price, G. *The Narrow Pass*. London: Hutchinson & Co. 1963, pp.61-63.

⁶ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness Unto Death*. [1849] London: Penguin Books. 1989, pp.62-3.

⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1944, p.261.

eternal, are somehow natural and indubitable.

In the *Or* volume of *Either/Or*, Judge William, the pseudonymous correspondent of the young aesthete 'A', presses the case for the value of choice: "So, then, a person has to live aesthetically, or has to live ethically." He goes on to judge that aesthetic living is not, strictly speaking, to choose choice: the aesthete is merely responding to feelings and emotions. Kierkegaard's aesthete is somewhat lost, insofar as the word 'lost' can be used of one who has no fixed direction. It may be said that the aesthete picks more than chooses. Even if one chooses not to choose, that is if he or she choose the aesthetical, this will not result in the continuation of an aesthetical life because the ensuing way of life is nevertheless the result of an ethical choice. The realm of the ethical is that of choice. To choose to remain within the aesthetical realm alone is self-contradictory, as the aesthetical is defined by the refusal of any serious choice. This is why Judge William describes the rejection of the ethical (i.e. the paradoxical wish to choose not to choose) as, "a quiet form of hell. People who adopt it do not truly live. The events of their lives may unfold one after the other. But as individuals they vanish like shadows; they are not really participating in their own existence." Judge William paints a portrait wherein such a person does not really exist. Such a person seems to be merely a responsive, spiritless thing. On the other hand, William remarks, "those who choose to live thereby also choose to be faced with a continual choice between good and evil - although this may only become apparent afterwards." To remain in what may be poetically described as the idyllic state of the unchoosing aesthete is to be in a pre-ethical state, is to be ethically

idle. Existence becomes fuller when the will is baptised by choice, this choice is the choice to have a will. In this context, Kierkegaard's imperative 'Choose yourself!' sounds a little like Nietzsche's 'Become what you are!' choosing to have a will is thus the baptism of the will rather than the creation of its possibility. The possibility of the will, all the same, is not concretised until it is chosen as such. To understand that one has to choose oneself is to deepen the understanding afforded by the Greek imperative to 'Know yourself!' Self-knowledge entails an epistemic gap that is not stressed in Kierkegaard's imperative; 'Choose yourself!' means 'choose yourself into existence' such that the self-relation is not just objective or epistemological, but fully reflexive and wilful.

Towards the integrity of will

The initiation of the will by choice is not a sufficient condition in Kierkegaard's philosophy for the attainment of anything like spirit, integrity or, as he often describes it, being a single individual. In 'Purity of Heart'⁸, Part One of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, Kierkegaard presents his reader with the idea that purity of heart is to will one thing and that one thing is to will the good in truth. He first argues that those who will pleasure, fame or power are not at all pursuing one thing, but are pursuing diverse and multifarious things so ever changing that one may

⁸ A reference to James 4:8, 'Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.' *New Testament*, KJV.

even hesitate to call them ends. Such people he calls double-minded. He goes on to argue that those who do indeed pursue the good, but do so to avoid punishment, or others who follow the good so that they themselves may be the hailed fellows who bring about its earthly realization (as if goodness could not at all do without them) are also double-minded, but in a way more cunning than the pleasure seekers. While these people say that certain things must be done and that certain other things must not be done, they are more concerned that it is they themselves who do or don't do these things. Even if they do or avoid things not to escape social censure or to gain applause, but rather to attain a proud consciousness, they are said not to have the purity of heart of willing the good in truth: an admixture of egoism makes them focus on two things and not on one such that they become self-deceived and believe they are clear-sighted when in truth they are, if I may express it thus, cross-eyed.

Kierkegaard gives a shrewd aetiology of this double-mindedness. The double-minded have not understood the need for the will to be master. Without this there can be no complete self-mastery. Kierkegaard argues that the will, "should be as hard as a sword that can cut stone and yet would be so soft that it could be wound about the waist. [...W]hen everything goes to pieces it is the will a person must cling to."⁹ The first sign of spiritual sickness diagnosed by Kierkegaard is not that temptations such as lust, power-hunger, indolence, mediocrity and immersion in

⁹ Kierkegaard, Søren. *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* [1847], Part One, 'On the Occasion of a Confession, Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing'. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XV*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1993, pp.74-75.

busyness lead to double-mindedness, but rather that akrasia, an unremedied weakness of the will, obtains in the person. Will, then, so easily becomes too much of a free market. The akrastic sees the will as something to be propped up, rather than as a sturdy prop, he or she is constantly having to drag forward the will or to push it into action with reasons, advice of others, experiences, mores, applause. The very things used to goad the will to action are things which, for a strong will, are seen as forces holding back the will's pursuit, thus, "he sails only with the speed of the delaying factors."¹⁰ Kierkegaard requires this evaluation of the will's strength in order to exhibit the wholeness that is borne of integrity.

The integrity of willing the good in truth bears the stamp of Classical Greece, especially that of Socrates, whose themes, as Plato informs, involve the combat of akrasia and ignorance. Kierkegaard reflects Socrates opinions when he says that if we truly will one thing, we must will the good, as though it were self-evidently impossible to will evil if we truly, fully and single-mindedly know what we are doing in the clear attitude of self-mastery. Willing the good in truth is Kierkegaard's formula for a pure integrity, an integrity that neither blurs external objectives nor confuses the selfish achievement of proud consciousness with the goal of the good. The ideal of personal integrity portrayed in 'Purity of Heart' is unity, involving a struggle with the dissoluteness of a weak will, unregulated desires and multiplicity (or at least duplicity). This is the message of Kierkegaard's 'edifying' or 'upbuilding' writings; the attainment of the

¹⁰ Ibid. p.75.

spirit ready for such a pursuit is described via a more complex path, a path explored in *The Sickness Unto Death*.

Attaining Spirit: Avoiding the Sickness Unto Death

Kierkegaard's thinking of the human individual is a first in the history of Philosophy's thinking of Man. Man as mind, as thinking animal, as created by God, as pure machine, as an emotional *conatus assendi*: these are all previous descriptions of human essence. Kierkegaard does indeed present an anthropology, but what is so special about any human being for Kierkegaard is not the essential which relates him substantially or otherwise to others of the species, but rather that the individual is distinguished as being categorically his or herself.

Kierkegaard's individual is unrepeatable, unpredictable and is yet no mere collection of accidents. The self as lived, existing being is a self-responsible, choosing individual. One is never a mere sum of accidental parts simply because these parts are made whole through being individuated in the person's relating these elements into a self. The self is more than a *Gestalt*. Neither did Kierkegaard prescribe, as Yeats, us to 'hammer our thoughts into unity.' The complex dialectic of Kierkegaard's self-relating is densely described in the first paragraphs of Part One of *The Sickness Unto Death*:

"The human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates to itself, or

that in the relation which is its relating to itself. The self is not the relation but the relation's relating 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 terms. Looked at in this way a human being is not yet a self.

In a relation between two things the relation is the third term in the form of a negative unity, and the two relate to the relation, and in the relation to that relation; this is what it is from the point of soul for soul and body to be in relation. If, on the other hand, the relation relates to itself, then this relation is the positive third, and this is the self."¹¹

In this dialectic of self, we do not begin with three entities, body, soul and spirit, but rather with two *en-soi* entities, as Sartre would put it, soul and body, and in their relation and this relation's self-relation, we have the *pour-soi*, spirit or self. For the self, there is no such *res extensa* as body, neither is there a substantial soul. There exist only bodily events and soulish events for the self as self-relating synthesis of soul and body. For Kierkegaard everything exists within the situation of the subject. In this understanding of the existentialist thinker there can clearly be seen the radical responsibility and freedom of Sartrean philosophy and the germ of Heideggerian Da-sein analysis. The radical freedom of self-conscious

¹¹ Kierkegaard, S. *The Sickness Unto Death*. Op.cit, p.43.

human reality in Sartre's philosophy can be seen to have roots in Kierkegaard's emphasis that there is no thing-like quality or substance that is the secret to human freedom. For Kierkegaard, being human requires a body and a soul, but this being human is still not sufficient for being a self. This self is similar to Sartre's understanding of the *pour-soi* in that it is a relation and not an entity. Kierkegaard's self as 'self-relating relation' is also echoed in Heidegger's Da-sein, the Being whose very Being is always (directly or indirectly with respect to consciousness) an issue for it. A major difference in approach between Kierkegaard and Heidegger is that while Kierkegaard emphasises subjectivity, Heidegger resists the very notion of the subject with his analysis of Da-sein's Being-in-the-world. However, Kierkegaardian subjectivity is far from being an unsituated Cartesian substance: it is an inwardness that must relate to the finitude and necessity of its worldly situation as well as to its own possibilities of being towards the future. Stated thus one is made aware not just of an interest in authenticity shared by Kierkegaard and Heidegger, but also in a similarity of position. The image of authentic Da-sein recovering its ownmost possibilities through resolve and against the sway of *das Man* recalls Kierkegaard's appeal to 'that single individual'¹² to resist the 'levelling' process that he described as a prevalent force of inauthenticity in his generation. Heidegger's comments on the 'curiosity' of *das Man*, passing over all topics, one to the next, treating each subject of knowledge as a source of Pascalian diversion, recall Kierkegaard's comments in the preface to *The Sickness Unto Death* about Christian seriousness involving the

¹² Kierkegaard's *Uplifting Discourses in Varying Spirits*, op. cit., was dedicated to 'that single individual'.

heroism of being oneself in one's particular situation: to this seriousness, academic gravitas can seem like the folly of idle curiosity.

Kierkegaard's self is fullness of self-consciousness. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard's psychological forerunner to the more spiritual *Sickness Unto Death*, Vigilius Haufniensis states that in the Biblical Adam myth, a myth of universal human applicability, the state of innocence before the Fall is a state wherein "the spirit is dreaming"¹³. After a choice is made spirit is posited: self-consciousness is transformed into will. Realized self-consciousness for Kierkegaard is freedom, often vertiginous and always, inescapably, will.

Ways of losing oneself

The account just given of Kierkegaard's anthropology has left unexplained his stressing the self's need to be a whole and single individual. This need to be wholly oneself is shown as being truly a need in *The Sickness Unto Death*, which work treats despair as the pathology of, in the final analysis, wanting to be other than oneself.

Anti-Climacus diagnoses three forms of despair: inauthentic or unconscious despair; in despair not wanting to be oneself; and in despair wanting to be oneself.

¹³ *The Concept of Dread*, [1845], New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.37.

Inauthentic despair is typical of the one who remains indifferent to his personal reality; this despair is unconscious, as the sufferer does not know that he is in despair. Such people are convinced that they are happy, failing to understand that this superficial happiness is the external sign of spiritual despair. Kierkegaard is not here abandoning his cause of subjectivity; he is rather calling for a deeper self-understanding. In an age lacking in spirituality, people can easily become so satisfied with their immediate feelings that anything more profound is thought not to exist. Kierkegaard regrets that a person can be, "so deceived by the joys of life or by its sorrows that he never becomes eternally and decisively conscious of himself as spirit, as self"¹⁴.

The despair that is ignorant of being in despair is the ignorance of having a self. This ignorance comes about through the fact that sensuous reactions usually outweigh the intellect. Anti-Climacus notes that such a person "is usually very far from wanting to be snatched from this error [...] considers it an assault, something bordering on murder"¹⁵. Such a violent reaction, as if against aggression, seems to parallel the reaction of Plato's prisoners in the cave when they are invited by the escaped prisoner to see existence in its fuller aspects and dimensions. Anti-Climacus says that this ignorant despairer "is too sensate to have the courage to risk and endure being spirit"¹⁶: this is the most common form of despair. Despair is unconscious in the aesthetic mode of being because it is impossible to reach

¹⁴ *The Sickness Unto Death*. Op.cit. p.40.

¹⁵ Ibid. p.73.

¹⁶ Ibid. p.73.

or comprehend spirit in purely aesthetic terms.

The fuller one's consciousness, Anti-Climacus relates, the more intense the despair. An example of sheer spirit is Kierkegaard's image of the devil expressing maximum despair in utter defiance, defiance so complete that it has about it no obscurity to act as a mitigating excuse¹⁷. At the other extreme, Kierkegaard's pre-Fall innocent person, the one who has never experienced the vertigo of anxiety, does not even know that despair exists.

What this notion of unconscious despair teaches us about understanding a person in a holistic manner is that unconscious despair is a sign of an imbalance in the self. The self, however, as the self-relating relation to all of the individual's aspects, actual and potential, generates what one might call the existential imperative. Insofar as the self exists, however much the spirit is dreaming within the sensuous life, it strives to become itself in its particular form; this drive to be requires that one overcomes the mere living out of life as spectator and sensuous enjoyer. This drive is more than the permanent possibility of selfhood, it is the existence of the self and can be witnessed when the world of the sensualist is ruptured when it is then realized that he or she is not only now in despair, but always was in despair. The drive of the self towards fuller becoming is an inescapable imperative because the self is not just the relation between all of a person's actual and potential dimensions. Such a relation would not be an existing

¹⁷ See Hannay, A. *The Arguments of the Philosophers: Kierkegaard*. London; Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1982, p.198-204. Hannay makes some interesting points about the demonic defiance to be oneself.

self but either just a fixed, *en-soi* fact about a person's constitution such that his or her development would be a mere unfolding of necessity through time, or otherwise it would be the mobile relations between accidentally acquired qualities through which a person would develop almost entirely at random. No, for Kierkegaard, the self is not just the seat of these relations between dimensions of the personality and its properties; it is the self-relation of each of these relations relating back to itself.

Some light on this somewhat obscure notion can be shed by Sartre's work on self and consciousness, *The Transcendence of the Ego*. In this work Sartre, like Kierkegaard, argues that there is no self, indeed that there is no ego, until intentional consciousness takes itself for its own object. It is this reflexive aspect of the self which guarantees that one is, to use the rhetoric of Anti-Climacus, either losing or winning oneself - that one is growing in self-possession or not. From this reflexive point of view, to lose self is to relate to one's talents and weaknesses, to necessities and possibilities in one's situation as though they were the only terms to which one can relate and to ignore the very relating to these things as something, indeed a key and essential something, to which one can relate. To win oneself is to relate to possibilities, etc. and to also relate to this relating as, to use a Heideggerian turn of phrase, one's ownmost possibility of being. It is this *self-relation* that establishes the centre of oneself as an individual, negating the loss of oneself through the more tangential relating to possibilities and necessities alone¹⁸. In relating to one's possibilities and necessities alone,

¹⁸ A good discussion on the possible excesses of Kierkegaard's individualism, an individualism which inspired Ibsen to base his *An Enemy of the People* on

and not to this relating itself, one's self remains a mere possibility, as peripheral and unchosen as any other possibility.

A word from Heidegger, echoing Kierkegaard, is useful here. 'What does it mean to save?' Heidegger asks in 'The Question Concerning Technology'¹⁹. 'Usually we think that it means to seize hold of a thing threatened by ruin in order to secure it in its former continuance. But the verb "to save" says more. To save is to fetch something home into its essence, in order to bring the essence for the first time into its proper appearing.' For Heidegger, to be saved is not just to be rescued from social, financial or any other such ruin that threatens from the outside, such that one can then continue as before. To be saved entails not just a continuation but a beginning in the sense that what is saved has its essence shine through such that it can now truly be itself. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger explicitly adopts the Kierkegaardian language of choosing oneself and winning oneself. Here Heidegger notes that "because Da-sein is always essentially its possibility, it *can* 'choose' itself in its being, it can win itself, it can lose itself, or it can never or only 'apparently' win itself. It can only have lost itself and it can only have not yet gained itself because it is essentially possible as authentic, that is, it belongs to itself"²⁰. Heidegger is here referring to the fact that Da-sein (that way of being which, in its being, already understands being insofar as its own being is an issue of concern for it) is primarily undiffer-

Kierkegaard, can be read in James Collins' *The Mind of Kierkegaard*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1983, pp.175-180.

¹⁹ Heidegger. *Basic Writings*. London: Routledge Kegan Paul. 1993, p.333.

²⁰ *Being and Time*, Op.cit. p.43.

entiated: it does not come into existence with a specific way of being or code of conduct. Winning oneself as authentically being oneself is not simply a matter of doing what one usually does, but of comporting oneself toward what it is to be Da-sein in all of its originally unsettled and undifferentiated way of being. This can be evaded, by simply choosing to identify with a social role and acting as though this were unproblematic (to only "apparently" win oneself), or one can face up to existence and risk winning oneself.

Despair as being *unable to die*

Despair, as refusal to be oneself, is a desire not to be oneself that knows that this desire is in vain. Kierkegaard's example here is that of the young girl rejected by the man whose fulfilled promise of marriage would have 'made her'. Kierkegaard comments that this spurned fiancée firstly did not want to be herself insofar as she hoped for a love match that would complete her such that marriage to her beloved would grant her the essential properties required to become her ideal self. When she realises that her original suitor, on whom she has set her heart's ease and her soul's completion, no longer desires her, she then despises herself in despair: she wishes to eat her heart out in despair, but, chained to herself, precisely this she cannot do. Its equally despairing counterpart is in despair wanting to be oneself. In this state the individual desires to be a certain self with certain qualities which are not his own: he or she wants by fiat to be someone else; Anti-Climacus' example here is Caesar Borgia's motto,

'Caesar or nothing!' Indeed both conditions of despair here can be resolved into wanting, in vain, to be rid of oneself. It is not that one really despairs over something, Anti-Climacus asserts, but that one despairs over having to be oneself. The power-crazed man who fails to become Caesar does not really despair over not becoming Caesar; he despairs at remaining this self that he cannot shake. Despair would like to eat itself up, as the rejected maiden, like Hamlet, who wishes to dissolve into tears. But despair's torment is that precisely this is impossible. The despairer's heartache is that he or she is unable to die to his or herself: prolonged despair is for this reason described as the sickness unto death.

Anti-Climacus argues that despair's being unable to consume the self proves the eternal in human being. Were there nothing eternal in man, he would be unable to despair. "That is the condition of despair. However much it eludes the despairer, however much (as must be especially the case with the kind of despair which is ignorance of being in despair) the despairer has succeeded in altogether losing his self, and in such a way that the loss is not in the least way noticeable, eternity will nevertheless make it evident that his condition is that of despair, and will nail him to his self so that the torment will still be that he cannot be rid of his self, and it will be evident that his success was an illusion. And this eternity must do, because having a self, being a self, is the greatest, the infinite, concession that has been made to man, but also eternity's claim on him."²¹

²¹ *The Sickness Unto Death*. Op. cit. p.51.

When Anti-Climacus tells the reader that, ever-vigilant, eternity will nail a man to his self as soon as he thinks that he has shaken off his self (thus making evident his despair), I don't think he means that swift armies of angels are perpetually ready to swoop down with God's hooks to crucify a man to his qualities. Anti-Climacus is obviously a Christian (and Kierkegaard felt so close to the position he relates in this work that he used his own name for the editorial preface, something he never did previously in his authorship, which speaks of Christian heroism in being oneself) yet the book is written by advancing intellectual arguments accessible without Christian faith; although the writer may aim to entice the reader towards this faith. For this reason, God is not named as the power which establishes the possibility of the self relation, rather we are told that there is either a Constituting Power that establishes this relation, or that the possibility of self relation is entirely self-created: "Such a relation, which relates to itself, a self, must either have established itself or have been established by something else.... Such a derived, established relation is the human self, a relation which relates to itself, and in relating to itself relates to something else."²²

It is worth noting here that Anti-Climacus goes on to dismiss the hypothesis that the possibility of the self-relation is self-made, as this would entail the impossibility of despair as the inevitably unsuccessful desire to be rid of oneself. Despair, awful though it is to undergo, is wonderful from the point of view of metaphysical analysis, he argues, because it teaches us the

²² Ibid. p.44.

eternal validity of the self established by a power to which we relate, however darkly, when we truly relate to ourselves. It doesn't appear to be the case that any external power is invoked when Anti-Climacus speaks of eternity in relation to the self.

In the above mentioned section on 'Purity of Heart' from the *Upbuilding Discourses* (a book in direct conceptual continuity with *The Sickness Unto Death*²³) Kierkegaard quotes Ecclesiastes saying that 'God hath set eternity in Man's heart' *Ecc.* 3:11²⁴. It seems that this is the self-fastening eternity invoked by Anti-Climacus, the eternity of the circle of self: that self is the relation that cannot but relate to itself. If I am right here in thinking that by the eternity of self Anti-Climacus means the eternity of a circular relation, then he is not here asserting just the linear and temporal continuation of living forever implied by immortality through resurrection. Rather he is asserting that the relation to one's self is atemporal: it is timeless. It is timeless in the sense that there is no 'time for...' being oneself while there is a 'time for...' sowing and a 'time for...' reaping, as is also mentioned in *Ecclesiastes*. This timeless quality of the self-relation is not linear, but reflexive and circular. This is far from suggesting that future and past have no bearing for the self, but it is true that one can attempt to exile his or her self-relation in the nostalgia of the past or in the

²³ In 'Purity of Heart', op. cit. Kierkegaard asks, 'is not despair actually double-mindedness?', p.30.

²⁴ *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, op.cit. p.11, Kierkegaard quotes the first clause of the verse from Ecclesiastes. The verse relates that God set eternity in our hearts 'so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.'

never-never fantasies set in the perpetual future. Despair tells of the relation that relates to itself when the individual attempts to slip away from this inevitable relation to self: its very evasion is a confrontation (the paradox of trying to deliberately ignore something) leading to deeper despair. Time cannot slacken this necessary bond; in this sense the self-relation of self has something of the eternal of it. Even on the rack of physical sickness, even under the agony of psychological torment or malaise, even by the shores of extreme delirium or delusion, the self is that relation which relates to itself.

The existential necessity of self-relation penetrates deep into the captivating mystery²⁵ of suffering and passion: it remains despite what may seem to be the overwhelming distractions of agony or of pleasure; this is why Anti-Climacus calls the commonest form of despair that which is ignorant of being in despair. Anti-Climacus asserts that this view is not gloomy or discouraging: it is uplifting as it calls every individual to his or her highest possibility: to be spirit. A clue to understanding what is meant by the self consisting in 'that relation which relates to itself' can be taken from Heidegger's understanding of Da-sein as 'distinguished by the fact that, in its very being, that being is an *issue* for it'²⁶. Despite Heidegger's resistance of the traditional language of subjectivity, his conception of *existence* owes

²⁵ Gabriel Marcel, the Catholic existential philosopher, noted that "a mystery [in distinction from a problem] is something in which I myself am involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and its initial validity" *Being and Having*, quoted in *The Mystery of Being*. Vol.1. London: Harvill Press Ltd. 1950, p.211.

²⁶ Heidegger. *Being and Time*. (32) [12]. Italics Heidegger's.

much to Kierkegaard's conception of *spirit*. Heidegger continues in what seems to be his interpretation of Kierkegaard's spirit, 'Da-sein always understands itself in terms of its existence - in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself'²⁷. The similarity of the self-relation in Da-sein with the self-relation in spirit does not end here; it is important for Kierkegaard that spirit or self is not just a synthesis of the soul and the body, of the possible and the necessary, or of any factors to which human reality relates, but rather that it is the relating of each of these relations to itself: equally Heidegger notes that, "Man's 'substance' is not spirit as a synthesis of soul and body; it is rather *existence*"²⁸.

Kierkegaard's eternal call to self can now be seen to be echoed in Heidegger's notion that Being is 'always already' an issue for Da-sein because it itself, in its Being, is concerned about its own Being. Any entity that attains the further concern of Da-sein attains this concern through being related, by Da-sein, back to Da-sein. Kierkegaard's eternal call of the self to itself is echoed in Da-sein's self-concern, within which is developed the ek-static time of temporality, and in the call of conscience, which calls existing Da-sein to its potentiality for being itself authentically. Heidegger's temporality develops from Da-sein's self-concern which can be seen in (a) Da-sein's *Geworfenheit* or thrownness, finding itself already having concerns, as already attuned within a situation interpreted and understood as meaningful, and in (b) Da-sein's finding itself as always already projecting upon possibilities of being itself which have been opened

²⁷ Heidegger. *Ibid.* (33) [12].

²⁸ *Ibid.* (153) [117].

up by the facticity of its thrownness. This facticity, it should be mentioned, closes off possibilities on the basis of how Da-sein finds itself as it opens up other possibilities. The acceptance of this found facticity by projecting into the future, Heidegger calls *transcendence*. This understanding of human temporality and its transcendent aspects are developments of Kierkegaard's existential understanding of self as not just relating to necessity (thrownness/facticity) and possibility (projection/transcendence) but as the relations' self relating. For Kierkegaard, the eternal is dominant over time; the eternal does not have its time, it makes time its own and, as it were in concession, clears a way for the temporal. The call to be spirit does not have its time like sowing or harvesting have their time, in this sense Anti-Climacus sees the call to be spirit as an eternal vocation and not "like the snail, which dissolves into slime as it goes along" (*Psalms* 58:8)²⁹.

Kierkegaard sees the modern individual as so desperately needing integrity that any signs of division and dissolution, signs of being a lumped together bag of whims and diversions, are taken as the pathological symptoms of an imbalance in a deeper struggle for (and often, as in despair, against) unity. Indeed the imbalance or balance in the person are not the deepest criteria for existential individuality, for the relations within the equilibrium itself are cohered in the reflexive existence of self. It is not so important from the point of view of self that one is in equilibrium as that the relating to factors within this equilibrium relates back to itself, achieving the existential

²⁹ Quoted by Kierkegaard in *Upbuilding Discourses* (op.cit. p.12) in the context of a discussion about wanting to 'outgrow' the eternal as we can outgrow childhood outlooks or fads.

coherence of a way of living as oneself, rather than merely negotiating the living out of a life through one's relations to the relevant factors of human living.

The Dialectic of Despair

Anti-Climacus' description of despair entails the understanding of the individual as a holistic unity: this is why the possibility of despair is said to be meritorious, while its lived actuality is nevertheless acknowledged as terrible. The merit of despair (as wanting to be rid of oneself), as seen through its analysis by Anti-Climacus, is exactly that it is *in despair*, i.e. it cannot succeed in being rid of the self. Thus the self is revealed as, in Kierkegaard's special use of the word, *eternal*. The individual is bound to the self. For Heidegger too, Da-sein is not without content as it emerges into a public and historical world not of its own making. Da-sein also always already has something of a factual content in that whenever it finds itself, it finds itself thrown: it is always in some situation or other, its moods always relate understandingly to meaningful aspects of its Being-in-the-world, and its understanding is always prefigured towards certain possibilities of being itself.

While Sartre also stresses the major importance of the dialectic between facticity and transcendence in human existence, he is more resistant, as he stresses the radical freedom of the individual, to the idea of a self that always already has some sort of content that then closes off other

possibilities. Sartre impresses upon his readers a notion of the self-constituting individual which Kierkegaard had already described in *The Sickness Unto Death*, as 'the negative infinite self' which refuses any specific form or content and thus sees itself as free to create itself in any direction of its choosing. There is nothing in this artificial development, Anti-Climacus states, which entails any commitment, and thus integrity is not ensured as the self-made self can abandon his created self at any moment and begin the creation of a new self from out of the abyss of his precious, though fantastic, negative infinite self. Sartre can be seen to avoid this collapse of integrity as he also emphasises the *finitude* of human existence. This finitude is not a reminder of the fact that we are mortal, but rather the calling to mind that we are temporal and finite beings such that if I commit a crime today, I can never later choose to be one who has never before committed a crime according to the criteria by which my previous crime was judged. This emphasis on finitude is a call to commitment as the recognition that whatever I do now will, in truth, have a bearing on whatever I may later choose to be and that my future commitment is called upon to help with any project that I may begin now. This is the reasoning behind Sartre's compact assertion that 'the self which I am depends on the self which I am not yet to the exact extent that the self I am not yet does not depend on the self which I am'³⁰. While Sartre argues that a specific, content-laden ego with fixed and particular properties cannot exist in any human being (such a being would be the God-like In-itself-For-itself, a fixed substance which was also free), he does argue with equal force

³⁰ Sartre. *Being and Nothingness* [1943] Trans. H. Barnes. London: Routledge. 1996, p.32.

that we cannot escape our freedom itself. For Sartre, as much as for Kierkegaard and Heidegger, human reality and freedom are to be understood within the existential context of a transcendent self-relating relation to facticity.

To return, for Anti-Climacus despair has merit in that its analysis points out that one cannot succeed in destroying one's self as such, it also points out the highest potential for any human being: to be spirit. For these very reasons despair is all the more passionate: (a) because one cannot be rid of self the despairer is all the more despairing in his or her increasing pain, and (b) because the fact that conscious despair reveals the self as such makes the despair against this indomitable fact all the more spirited, like a carp thrashing against the pull of the line which has hooked it. The exploration of despair is made dialectically because despair is seen to exist between the poles of temporality and eternity, finitude and infinity, necessity and possibility. Through this dialectic, despair is shown to be a spiritual malaise. In this sense spirituality is not abstract but applies to the whole person as situated and projected being.

Infinitude's despair

A common conception of spirit is that it treats of the infinite as no more than ghostly possibility, a realm into which the imagination can become volatilised without requiring actual incorporation: this is so far from what Anti-Climacus means by spirit that he notes that this attitude can only end

in despair. Such a person concentrates on wisdom and poetry, on learning, imagination and reasoning, but if this increase in infinitude is not then finitized in terms of the individual's concrete existence then the self is lost to self-transcendence. The self thus loses its chance for integration and is squandered in the infinities of the imagination. To be lost to the infinite is to chase after, or be carried away by, the fantastic (in both cases the individual's responsibility is total). Without anchor in the finite, there is an excess of unchecked imagination and, pawned to the devil as Anti-Climacus puts it, the individual plunges headlong into the fantastic.

Finitude's despair

The opposite danger arises when the self confines its existence to the narrow shores of necessity, temporality and the finite: the lack of infinitude is desperately narrow-minded and mean spirited. To be in this form of despair is "to ascribe infinite value to the indifferent"³¹. This despairer seeks perfection in being a somebody, in being outwardly respected by others who hold the finite coinage that betokens ones place in the external economy of value and esteem. Far from becoming infinitely volatilised, such a person is immersed in the hustle and bustle. Such a one 'gets on in the world' as if it were the only thing to do. Such a one may be famous for his or her integrity in life's dealings: but the self is lost in attaching infinite value to the indifferent; "instead of being a self, [he has]

³¹ *The Sickness Unto Death*. Op.cit. p.63.

become a cipher, one more person, one more repetition of this perpetual one-and-the-same³². The despair of finitude is to become a coin whose face is worn smooth through market usage; the worst of this despair is that this usage that wears down the face is precisely what the individual wished. In conforming to the world's standards, this person is ground smooth as a pebble instead of allowing the infinite to express itself in his or her existence through venturing oneself in the highest sense.

Possibility's despair

As existing human beings we must relate to both necessity and possibility. If we are to become ourselves, personal becoming must not be regarded as a purely imaginative possibility, we must strive for genuine fulfilment. From the sole vantage of possibility, more and more things become possible, yet in this widening vista the self is swallowed whole by the abyss of its own empty possibility if a real commitment to actualisation is not made. Anti-Climacus confidently notes that, 'In the possibility of itself, the self is still far from [...] itself'³³. Indeed, the fewer options one actualises, the more remains possible: if I join a Left-wing party, I can't then join a Right-wing political party tomorrow unless I abandon yesterday's commitment. Through mistaking the wish for the deed, the individual becomes a mirage to himself, a mirage held in perpetual, somewhat sceptical, suspension. Pursuing the mirages of possibility, a person sees a

³² Ibid. p.63.

³³ Ibid., p.67.

proliferation of possible selves. He or she then experiments with different possible selves as with so many different outfits; meanwhile, our hero has floated far away from the concrete givenness of his or her individuality. In this position, the negative infinite self (that which could indeed become anything) has been chosen, but only as the negative, which is to say that no particular choice has been carried through but the choice of experimental non-commitment. As such, the infinite possibility of this course enthrones its follower as "a king without a country"³⁴. Whatever self is chosen, and however deep the reasons for such existential pursuit seem to run, this self can always be retracted and replaced by another role: the negative infinite self, with its perpetually displayed parade of possibility, therefore demonstrates as much loosening as it does binding power.

Pure possibility can become lost in a universe of possibilities such that none of them are followed, or, which in one sense amounts to the same, possibilities are abandoned as readily as they are adopted. Despairing in possibility, one fails to acknowledge the limits of the necessary in oneself. The pity here is not that one makes nothing of himself, but that he does not become aware of himself as a definite something: 'What is really missing is the strength to obey, to yield to the necessary in one's self, what might be called one's limits'³⁵. Anti-Climacus seems here to be calling for the integrity required to honour one's commitments and for the foresight required not to too easily make commitments which one may later wish to break. There is also a sense here of Heidegger's thrownness: the self has its necessary limits insofar as it is honest about its past and current situation.

³⁴ Ibid. p.100.

³⁵ Ibid. p.67.

To be free of the necessity in oneself is to become at variance to whatever is valuable for one, which is to live a lie, or to kill what was previously held to be a truth. Like the *gigantomachia*, in which the victors became known as the gods and the vanquished, titans, the search for truth can slay many pretenders once held to have been kings. When Aristotle confessed that Plato was dear to him, but dearer still was truth, he retained his integrity both as a friend and as a philosopher. On this understanding of Kierkegaard, it appears that choice is a serious matter insofar as it not only has important consequences concerning one's values, but also that it leaves its stamp in the form of character. It seems that for Kierkegaard while character is chosen, a good part of what is chosen is some sort of God-given content. This, while not explicit in Kierkegaard's writings, cannot be dismissed as absent. In relating to oneself most fully, Kierkegaard writes, one relates to something outside of oneself, whether it is to God or to the Power which instantiated one. If one does not yield to the necessary in one's self, there are two main careers left open. With hope one can pursue the possible only to lose the way back home to the self; with dread one can pursue with melancholic love one of dread's possibilities, that of leaving the individual to perish in what he or she was in dread of perishing.

Necessity's despair

The despair of necessity is the acceptance of fatalism or of determinism. One needs faith in order to get hold of possibility. Fatalistic acceptance

leads to losing oneself, argues Anti-Climacus, in the materialistic and the trivial. Necessity's despair gives up on possibility as containing a saving power. Yet without possibility, one cannot draw breath as a free human being and is dragged into determinism's machine by his shirttail. Such a one will then take comfort from mundane probability in following the general and spiritless course of the others. His or her imagination sits in the dank air of the probable, 'no matter whether he is a tapster or a prime minister'³⁶. The latent possibility within this self exacts its revenge in the form of bitter frustration. In necessity's despair, one attempts to draw his or her 'ought' from nothing more than what already 'is'. This despairer is like the Stoic who thinks it possible to live according to nature, as if there obtained a natural order that one is then left only to follow or else perish. Anti-Climacus' contrary suggestion is that one can only proceed as a self by grasping possibility's what-is-not-but-could-be. To the one in the grip of necessity's despair, this possibility, if seen at all, is seen as too strenuous and improbable to be possible at all.

The self that cannot be broken

In exploring the various forms of despair, Anti-Climacus is not arguing that for any one dimension apprehended, say necessity, its counterpart (which would be possibility) is wholly absent. Anti-Climacus is saying that in, say, necessity's despair, there is despair precisely because possibility

³⁶ *The Sickness Unto Death*, op. cit., p.69.

cannot be lost: it is, as it were, the ghost of possibility which haunts the one in necessity's despair. It is the ghost of one's possible, fuller, future concrete self that is at the same time the present self in despair. Living temporally, Anti-Climacus suggests, the eternal imperative to be oneself will always make itself felt. I call this an 'eternal imperative' here because it is atemporal in the sense that there is never any better or worse 'time for' the imperative and that, like Sartre's opinion of anxiety, we are always *subject* to it (subject to it, if Anti-Climacus is right, in a logically necessary, therefore in an eternal way, rather than subject to it as a pressing - datable or historical - contingency), although it is much more rarely felt. Despair is the very intuition of this imperative from which it wants to be free, yet to be free of it entails the total annihilation that is not freedom at all, but nothing. There is a parallel here with Sartre's idea of the human desire in bad faith to want to be, and to enjoy being, a fixed, solid *en-soi* being, and yet still to remain a *pour-soi* capable of enjoyment and of enjoying itself and its pleasures in a legal sense of enjoyment (the right to use of property held by a free and rational being). Because one cannot be free of the self and its existential imperative, Anti-Climacus calls despair the sickness unto death: its cure is either to want, at last, to be the self which one is, based firmly in the power which established this possibility, or to persist in this sickness until the inevitability of death. The analysis of despair reveals not a broken self, but a self that cannot be broken, a self whose wholeness and existence Anti-Climacus terms 'eternal' because there is no release from this self within time. It is this emphasis on the integrity of the self that has religious significance in Kierkegaard's authorship. Kierkegaard describes Christian heroism, in the editorial preface, as choosing to be oneself before

God, rather than attempting to evade oneself by fleeing from existence. The emphasis on God is transferred to the power that establishes the possibility of the self-relation. Just as Jonah discovered that it was almost an almost laughably misconceived scheme to attempt to hide from God, we can see the misjudgement in not choosing to be oneself before the power that established this possibility, not choosing to be oneself here entails attempted self-evasion. If God did not exist and I established my own self-relation, then firstly I am attempting to evade myself as if I just have to wait until I fall asleep, and secondly, this whole charade of evasion is not necessary as I simply destroy despair by establishing a more preferable self! Choosing to be oneself is venturing to be spirit; to live one's self in one's mode of existence. The analysis of despair shows that deliberately being oneself is far from being a simple, inevitable tautology: it is a result of will. The simple tautology is that 'I am myself', 'I am what I am', the identity of 'I = I'. Nothing could be simpler. Kierkegaard has shown how this can be so difficult for human beings. To want to be the self which one already is requires the strength of will to choose to be oneself and to carry on making choices with the strength of that self. No philosopher before Kierkegaard had suggested this crucial point about existence, which point required his painstaking analysis of despair.

The concept of the existential imperative of the eternal self is not an assertion of static human qualities of ability and perception, neither does it only promote dynamic human forces of reason and passion: such things are included as terms in the self's relations, but they do not comprise the self as self-relating relation. Kierkegaard's existential conception of the

individual can also be seen to go beyond the holistic notion of Spinoza's *conatus assendi* and British Hegelian notions of self-realization. Spinoza's *conatus* was the 'actual essence of the thing itself'³⁷ and was a drive towards self-plenitude³⁸. The Kierkegaardian self is not something which automatically unfolds into its fullness according to a regular internal principle, indeed it first becomes self-aware in its encounter with non-being in the moods of dread or anxiety. New modes or levels of existence are not for Kierkegaard the concrete unravelling of self-realizing patterns: what could be further from this than the mortal leaps and somersaults out of fear and trembling and into the unknown and wholly irregular? It should be more than apparent that Kierkegaardian existence does not have the comfort of being able to unfold through extrapolated algorithms any more than it may remain wholly comfortable following universal ethical precepts: to exist is to face the uncertain, to be 'a lieutenant of the nothing'³⁹, hence the concepts of despair and faith become so pertinent in Kierkegaard's philosophy rather than being a quirk of his Christianity which may not properly be subtracted from his central existential concepts.

The Sickness Unto Death diagnoses despair as a dysfunction of the human synthesis from the existential point of view of the self-relation of these relations. The elements of this synthesis, finitude and infinitude, possibil-

³⁷ Spinoza. *Ethics*. Part III, proposition vii.

³⁸ See Levinas, E. 'Existence and Ethics', in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*. Ed.s Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p.30. Levinas remarks that for Spinoza, Kierkegaard and Heidegger, egoism is not just 'some vile defect in the subject, but [...] its ontology'.

³⁹ Heidegger, M., What is Metaphysics? [1929], *Basic Writings*, p.106, London, Routledge, 1999.

ity and necessity, are undoubtedly metaphysical categories, yet Anti-Climacus describes with them something deeply empirical as poles in the depths and heights of lived personality. Experience is at the base of Anti-Climacus' dialectically unfolding psychology. Throughout the book, the reader faces a work that addresses the problems of existence and not just those of thought, which are alluded to in the preface as 'jest and vanity'.

A special feature of Kierkegaard's understanding of the place of mood in philosophy that painful, unpleasant moods are qualitatively awful and can render turmoil in the individual. Pain notwithstanding, this same turmoil is a sign that points to the transcendence in human reality. Kierkegaard says that despair, in all its terrible quality as something to be suffered and felt, points to the glory and dignity of the human individual as an existence that may attain spirit: this very turmoil is impossible in a creature that cannot relate to itself and choose itself. Heidegger repeats this theme when he makes a special analysis of anxiety - in *Being and Time* and in his essay 'What is Metaphysics?' - asserting that in the vertiginous, uncanny homelessness of anxiety wherein all worldly entities recede in significance towards nullity, one must face disclosed being-in-the-world as such. Anxiety and despair are extremely disturbing and it is difficult to imagine oneself deliberately wanting to feel them in their fullest qualities and to live in the midst and truth of their disclosures. Yet at the same time anxiety is an indication of Da-sein's capacity for understanding being and for understanding its own being in the heart of its very being. Sartre makes the same observations and expands upon Heidegger's understanding of the we

can and often do flee from this anxiety into public and familiar interpretations of the world, a move made with (false) hope in the 'spirit of seriousness', a hope in bad faith against the disclosure, given in anxiety, of one's world-defining and hence infinite freedom. 'All Christian knowledge', writes Kierkegaard, as himself and not under the pseudonym of Anti-Climacus, 'however strict its form, ought to be anxiously concerned; but this concern is precisely the note of the edifying.' Heidegger was to take this keynote of concern, a concern ever-present but fully disclosed in anxiety, and make it the unifying existential in his analysis of Da-sein, of what it is and must be in order to ek-sist. Kierkegaard continues, 'Concern implies relationship to life, to the reality of personal existence,' as Sartre would also stress in his emphasis on commitment and engagement, 'and thus in a Christian sense it is seriousness.'

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