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KIERKEGAARD, MIMESIS, AND MODERNITY

A STUDY OF IMITATION, EXISTENCE, AND AFFECT

Wojciech Kaftanski



Kierkegaard, Mimesis, and Modernity

This book challenges the widespread view of Kierkegaard's idiosyncratic and predominantly religious position on mimesis.

Taking mimesis as a crucial conceptual point of reference in reading Kierkegaard, this book offers a nuanced understanding of the relation between aesthetics and religion in his thought. Kaftanski shows how Kierkegaard's dialectical-existential reading of mimesis interlaces aesthetic and religious themes, including the familiar core concepts of imitation, repetition, and admiration as well as the newly arisen notions of affectivity, contagion, and crowd behavior. Kierkegaard's enduring relevance to the malaises of our own day is firmly established by his classic concern for the meaning of human life informed by reflective meditation on the mimetic origins of the contemporary age.

Kierkegaard, Mimesis, and Modernity will be of interest to scholars and advanced students working on Kierkegaard, Continental philosophy, the history of aesthetics, and critical and religious studies.

Wojciech Kaftanski is a Postdoctoral Fellow and Communications Associate at the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University. He is a former Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Husserl Archives/Centre for Phenomenology and Continental Philosophy at KU Leuven, and a former House Foundation Fellow at the Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf College.

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English Translations

- BA: *The Book on Adler*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- CA: *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).
- CD: *Christian Discourses and The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- CDL: *The Concept of Dread*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967).
- CI: *The Concept of Irony* together with "Notes on Schelling's Berlin Lectures," trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).
- COR: *The Corsair Affair*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).
- CUP1: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol. 1, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- CUP2: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol. 2, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- EO1: *Either/Or: Part I*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).
- EO2: *Either/Or: Part II*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).
- EPW: *Early Polemical Writings*, trans. Julia Watkins (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- EUD: *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard H. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- FSE: *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- FT: *Fear and Trembling and Repetition* trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).
- JFY: *Judge for Yourself!* See *For Self-Examination* (n.d.).
- JP 1–7: *Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 7 vols., ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1967–1978).

- LD: *Letters and Documents*, trans. Hendrik Rosenmeier (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).
- M: *The Moment and Late Writings*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- P: *Prefaces and Writing Sampler*, trans. Todd W. Nichol (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- PC: *Practice in Christianity*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).
- PF: *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).
- PV: *The Point of View including On My Work as an Author, The Point of View for My Work as an Author, and Armed Neutrality*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).
- R: *Repetition*. See *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition* (n.d.).
- SLW: *Stages on Life's Way*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).
- SUD: *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).
- TA: *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review*, trans. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).
- UDVS: *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).
- WA: *Without Authority*, "The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air," "Two Ethical-Religious Essays," "Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays," "An Upbuilding Discourse," "Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays," trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- WL: *Works of Love*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

Danish Texts

- Pap.: *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, vols. I–XVI, ed. Peter A. Heiberg, Victor Kuhr, Einer Torsting, Niels Thulstrup, and Niel Jørgen Cappelørn (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909–1948; 1968–1978).
- SKS 1–28: *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vols 1–28, vols. K1–K28, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, Johnny Kondrup, Alastair McKinnon and Finn Hauberg Mortensen (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag 1997–2013).



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Introduction

Kierkegaard and Modernity

The writings of Søren Kierkegaard offer us one of the most comprehensive and profound accounts of modernity. In his many works, Kierkegaard never simply resorts to defining and criticizing modernity from an objective and fixed point of view. His perspective on modernity is that of an insider. Being a member of modern society, Kierkegaard wants us to *understand* and *feel* modernity. In that sense, his writings serve as a palpable and convincing description of the modern *experience*. In the secondary literature on this topic, Kierkegaard is overwhelmingly portrayed as a critic of modernity. Evaluations of his disparaging view of modernity range from portraying him as a “reactionary” thinker (Adorno 1989: 38), to situating his work in the vein of “ideology critique” (Westphal 1991), to viewing him as antimodern in the sense of belonging to a group of “modern critics of modernity” (Rossatti 2016).

Kierkegaard experiences modernity largely through a set of lenses that combine religious and sociopolitical outlooks. He sees in modernity a mysterious force animating masses of people to uncoordinated collective commotion advancing in all directions and quashing any resistance that is encountered along the way. Modernity is characterized by a dissolution of differences leading to normative uniformity on an unprecedented scale. In the modern age, conflicting ideologies are being abridged and amalgamated into enigmatic compounds. The activities of the masses amount to spontaneous reflexive processes produced by mimetic re-actions between anonymous people assembled in gatherings—“the crowd”—but also assembled in groupings that are not characterized by physical proximity—“the public.” Significantly amplified by modernity, human sociability and collectivity have impacted people on the individual level. Kierkegaard sees this trend as effectively aiming at challenging and, as a result, marginalizing the value of human individuality, the meaning of subjective experience, and the role of passion and faith in daily life. Modernity forces individuals to rethink their sense of identity, their place in the world, and the meaning of life.

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The primary source drawn on to sustain the image of Kierkegaard's vehement criticism of "the modern era" is found in his *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age: A Literary Review*. This book examines the work by Thomasine Christine Gyllembourg-Ehrensward entitled *Two Ages*. In his review, Kierkegaard agrees with the eponymous distinction that is made there between *The Age of Revolution* and *The Present Age*. While critical of both "ages" that belonged to one sociohistorical movement of modernity, Kierkegaard finds the latter attitude to life particularly worthy of condemnation. He reproaches "The Present Age" for being calculative, indecisive, passionless, concerned with the superficial, and "*prudentially relaxing in indolence*" (TA: 68/SKS 8: 66). In contrast, "the age of revolution," as Kierkegaard notes repeatedly (indeed, no fewer than five times), "is essentially passionate." However, it would be erroneous to think that he regards the merits of the age of revolution without a proper critical eye. Just as reflection is not evil in itself for Kierkegaard, so passion should not be deemed inherently good in modernity.

Drawing on his own observation of modern times, Kierkegaard adds that the age of revolution has been ultimately swallowed and appropriated by the present age, creating a hybrid of "[a]n age that is revolutionary but also reflecting and devoid of passion" (TA: 77/SKS 8: 74). This hybrid age, which "*wants to overthrow everything, set aside everything*" is unable to truly account for the realities of ordinary human existence (TA: 77/SKS 8: 74). To this he responds with a positive conception of life, structured around repetition, which reevaluates the "domestic life." It does so by embracing the similar, the repeated, the habitual, and the embodied in family and social relationships, and by arguing for a meaning located in time-oriented human existence.

Kierkegaard's dialectical reading of both ages is emblematic of his approach to modernity more broadly. On the one hand, he thinks about modernity in the sense of "modern ideas" and "mentalities of two different generations" representative of modernity, as is the case in *Two Ages*. In that context, Kierkegaard is especially attuned to modernity understood as a change, or a caesura that marks the beginning of a new era, which he calls "the age." The new times are not necessarily signaled by a specific historical event, but rather by a shift in a way of thinking about human existence in the modern world, and about the role of authority and institutions in humanity's orientation in the world. On the other hand, Kierkegaard conceptualizes modernity in relation to a certain reconstruction of the human subject rendered in the specifically modern environment: the city. In that sense, he is not blind to modernity understood as an urban phenomenon. He takes the city as a decisive vantage point on human being-and-doing in the modern world. He also considers living in the city as representative of a uniquely individual and communal experience.

Such a dialectical approach to modernity incorporates two distinct yet interrelated dimensions: cultural-ideological and urban. Modernity,

then, means specific sociopolitical phenomena that cannot be truthfully accounted for in isolation from the process of urbanization. Seen from another perspective, it is the former that is precisely expressed in the latter. Life in the city, of course, is an important theme within modern literature. We find detailed accounts of urban life, its vicissitudes and developments, in the works of Maupassant and Hugo, among others. Furthermore, the literary output of Dickens cannot be divorced from his urbanology of London, or Dostoevsky's from St. Petersburg, and so it is with Kierkegaard and Copenhagen.

Mimesis, the City, Existence

My focus on modernity in general, and the city in particular, is motivated by the main subject of this book: mimesis in Kierkegaard's authorship. Serving as a background for this investigation is the idea that Kierkegaard's "rediscovery" and reconceptualization of mimesis is triggered by his experience of modernity. In that regard, I make three overarching assertions, which I would like to briefly outline before presenting the specific claims set out in the book.

First, Kierkegaard views modernity as amplifying the intensity of humans' employment of mimesis in daily life by often generating new modes of engaging mimesis in various, often newly emerging domains of human existence. Second, his own experiences of urban life coupled with his observations of others living in the city fundamentally contribute to Kierkegaard's rendering of mimesis. Third, Kierkegaard's immersion in modern culture inspires him to eventually reconceptualize mimesis from its classical reading as representation to a more contemporary appraisal as embodied, collective, affective.

As to my first claim, I present Kierkegaard as a thinker who, in his sustained philosophical observation of modernity, traces various classical and new forms of human engagement of mimesis that are constitutive of the modern subject. He sees mimesis not only as operating in many intimate aspects of the daily lives of urban dwellers, such as their sense of identity, family relationships, and religion, but also as shaping the social fabric by influencing the job market, entertainment, science, and architecture.

Born in 1813, Kierkegaard witnessed firsthand the dawn of modernity in the capital city of the Kingdom of Denmark. Going through an unprecedented period of intellectual activity, the Danish Golden Age, Copenhagen was catching up with the iconic modern capitals of the day. And, indeed, the city had a lot to catch up with. The reinvention of Copenhagen was conducted in a mimetic way. Battered by the British fleet in the two battles of Copenhagen, on the verge of bankruptcy, Copenhagen was eyeing up modern cities for inspiration. The three main model cities for imitation were Berlin, Paris, and London. The new vision of the "scarred city" was

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shaped largely by either foreigners or those who acquired and mastered their trade outside of Copenhagen (Steiner 2014: 4). One such example we find in the principal architect of the modernization of Copenhagen. Responsible for turning a dinky Baroque city confined within medieval walls and ramparts into an urban space with monumental architecture of the institutional and domestic space characteristic of modernism was C. F. Hansen. He was a Norwegian, trained in Rome and Paris (Steiner 2014: 19–63).¹ This nonorganic modernization of Copenhagen, together with the arrival of the speculative philosophy of Hegel, exemplified in the work of H. L. Martensen, represent for Kierkegaard paradigmatic instances of an unqualified and uncritical imitation of the new, which he repeatedly describes in his journals as aping and following fashion.

The city is not just an important vantage point on modernity, nor is it simply a case that brings us closer to crucial features of modernity. Kierkegaard's observation of the changing Copenhagen is the background for his thinking about how mimesis entails both retaining the old and assimilating the new. Such an observation comes close to his concept of becoming, transposed to the individual human level. Understood in this way, the mimesis of simultaneous imitation and change is also symptomatic of Kierkegaard's literary production more broadly, as I argue in the first chapter of this book. The becoming of the city is a macro-representation of the becoming of an individual. In that sense, the city and its inhabitants mirror one another. The city also represents the overlapping of the internal and external worlds of a modern individual.

We learn from George Pattison's *Poor Paris! Kierkegaard's Critique of the Spectacular City* that the city is "the fullest possible embodiment of the ideological intentions of modernity" (1999: 1). Pattison's reasons for such a claim are founded in his concept of "spectacularization" that is central to what he sees in Kierkegaard as "the aesthetics of modern urbanity" (1999: 17). Spectacularization means, for Pattison, a certain aesthetic quality of the city that invites its inhabitants to take on a theatrical interaction with it. Such interaction can be both passive and active. Its passive dimension pertains to indifferent observation. The city's environment is an accommodation of the "culture" of the gaze, comprising a voyeuristic, often objectifying process of observation. The active interaction with the city has a mimetic-performative dimension; it means engaging in creating and embodying a multiplicity of social roles and then acting them out, often randomly, in the city, which is understood as a great stage.

My second overarching claim is that Kierkegaard's observations of modern existence in the city provide a crucial background for his novel reading of mimesis. I present Kierkegaard here as an astute eyewitness to, but also a participant in the modern project, which, as he deftly perceives, fundamentally affects numerous aspects of human life. Kierkegaard sees urban existence forcing people to redefine their individual and communal lives. While

the human search for meaning is not a distinctively modern phenomenon, this pursuit becomes a different venture in the modern world. The mass influx of people from rural areas to large agglomerations, as well as rapid urbanization, changed the way people thought and lived (Kirmmse 1990).

Dispersed across such vast areas, people from different backgrounds, but with similar aspirations, came together in smaller, often congested spaces. Big cities create environments in which emerging philosophical ideas and political movements gain traction. City residents soon become exposed to technological innovations and discoveries in the natural sciences. These phenomena create new possibilities for the newcomers and residents alike, but they also produce social tensions and give rise to new problems and dilemmas.

The third overarching claim of this book is that Kierkegaard's experience of modernity shapes his distinct view of mimesis as collective, embodied, and affective. It is crucial to note that his appraisal of mimesis shifts from the ideal of representation characterizing pre-modern and early modern views of mimesis to a more mature modern conceptualizing of mimesis that focuses on humans as radically imitative creatures. Furthermore, his view of mimesis is modern in the sense of being ambivalent, pharmacological, performative-interpretative, and stretched between the individual and the social. Kierkegaard's reconceptualization of mimesis is motivated by his desire to understand and respond to the manner in which modernity influences social relationships at both the micro and the macro scales. Preceding such social theorists as Gabriel Tarde and Gustav Le Bon, Kierkegaard notes the profound role played by mimesis within modern society.

Modernity brought class distinctions and redefined human existence at a deeper, existential level. Having inherited a substantial amount of wealth, Kierkegaard finds himself a member of the "haves," the bourgeoisie, with all the accompanying entitlements, privileges, access to goods, and education. But he is also served by the "have-nots" who represent the vast majority of urban dwellers. Although he initially embraces his social status, he soon grows impatient and critical of his class. His criticism of the upper class is based on how he sees mimesis functioning in the bourgeois class. He finds them to be living a dispassionate life: bored, alienated, envious, and excessively influenced by fashion. Fashion operates here on several levels. It pertains to the imitation (both direct and indirect) of the lifestyles of people from the same class; it also refers to the uncritical appropriation of the ideals, values, and views of other people with the sole purpose of furnishing one's own. Kierkegaard engages the concept of fashion to criticize the act of perpetually seizing on the new and exciting, such as revolutionary ideals or nationalistic sentiments in Denmark, and their uncritical imitation, particularly on the part of the upper classes.

Kierkegaard takes the *flâneur* as a special case of a fashion-dependent bourgeois. Focused mostly on their outward behavior, *flâneurs* distance

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themselves from the real world of possibilities and engage in dispassionate observation of others (Outka 2009: 137). This phenomenon Kierkegaard sees chiefly in the young and privileged who spend their time strolling through the city, visiting department stores, frequenting theaters and amusement parks, but also meeting at cafes or cocktail parties to exchange gossip about the next series of novelties coming to town and discussing whether or not to engage with them.

At the other end of the social spectrum, the working class was no less affected by mimesis. It penetrated their private lives, greatly influencing their often-monotonous labor. Working-class existence was determined by mechanical, mindless, and objectifying repetition. In factories, wool mills, and servitude, engaged in salaried labor, people were reduced to performing tedious manual and alienating work, which consisted mainly of producing multitudes of copies. Their accommodation was similar in appearance, as were their possessions, clothing, and objects of daily usage, as well as their concerns and worries. The values and ambitions of the working class were dependent on their ultimate point of reference: the class above them. The “have-nots” desired the meaning and quality of life of the “haves.” The only way out of that precarious condition was to become members of the class above them. This was possible by undertaking great efforts to imitate and appropriate the identity, values, and standards of the bourgeoisie, and acquiring objects representing the bourgeois identity such as particular items of clothing, furniture, porcelain dishes, and paintings. The political alternative to this cultural mimesis was revolutionary mass action, which Kierkegaard denounces as being based on mimetic-affective crowd behavior.

Conceptual Remarks and Methodology

No one has explained the complexity of mimesis better than Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf in their magnum opus, *Mimesis: Culture, Art, Society* (1995; see also Potolsky 2006). The concept of *mimesis* is difficult to precisely pin down. Since its conceptual formulation in the dialogues of Plato, it has carried different connotations depending on the period and context. Like many thinkers, Plato himself does not deploy one specific understanding of *mimesis*. In the *Republic*, Plato recommends avoiding *mimesis* as it seduces gullible people into mistaking appearance for reality and effectively undermines the social fabric of the ideal polis. Yet, in *Laws*, he praises *mimesis* and even recommends it, arguing that *mimesis* underwrites the structure of the ideal state, as the successful functioning of the state is based on the imitation, appropriation, and implementation of the prototypical modes of existence guided by virtue, honesty, and nobility (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 32).

No translation of the term into any vernacular is capable of exhausting or securing its multivocal meaning. The term can designate “emulation,

mimicry, dissimulation, doubling, theatricality, realism, identification, correspondence, depiction, verisimilitude, resemblance” (Potolsky 2006: 1), but also similarity, appearance, illusion, education or development, contagion, and suggestion (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 34–44, 48). Furthermore, mimesis qualifies the distinction between real and unreal, original and copy, true and untrue, ethical and unethical, similarity and distortion; it also enables one to discern the difference between a noble person and an imposter (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 1–8). Lastly, it is used in different disciplines and has both individual and social dimensions. Mimesis configures different worlds—internal and external, but also symbolic and figurative—and it enables the relation between the two worlds.²

What, then, are we to make of Kierkegaard’s understanding and use of mimesis? Like Plato, and many others after him, Kierkegaard does not “have” a specific or consistent conceptualization in mind. In his extensive and complex authorship, Kierkegaard engages a plethora of meanings of mimesis. When speaking of mimesis in this book, then, I do not mean simply imitation, or the imitation of Christ (the most explored aspect of mimesis in Kierkegaard to date). To have a firmer grasp on the concept, it is important to think of Kierkegaard as positing himself in relation to mimesis as a modern critic of modernity. Being well-read in the pre-modern iterations of mimesis, Kierkegaard is especially sensitive to its modern conceptualizations in three key respects.

First, Kierkegaard pays attention to the mimetic discourse of his contemporaries who disparage the classical rendering of mimesis as faithful imitation of a model. As such, he is attentive to mimesis understood as creativity. This view of mimesis, championed by Kant and the Romantics, focuses on the notions of originality, genius, individuality, imagination, and, obviously, creativity. Second, Kierkegaard is attuned to a reading of mimesis as ambivalent, inconspicuous, and in many ways blurry. In this regard, he demonstrates his acute understanding of the power of mimesis, and an awareness of its many guises. Exploring the performative-interpretative and specifically social and embodied dimensions of mimesis, he anticipates and prefigures important contemporary renderings and employments of mimesis as it is used in both social and natural sciences—such as contagion, mimetic desire, suggestibility, crowd behavior, and goal-oriented imitation. Third, Kierkegaard’s reading of mimesis is pharmacological. He finds mimesis to be both a problem and a cure for the maladies of the modern individual. In that sense, his work is in line with such thinkers as Friedrich Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida, René Girard, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and more recently Nidesh Lawtoo.

Yet, embracing the modern reformulation of the concept, Kierkegaard does not simply criticize or dogmatically reject the classical formulation of mimesis understood as imitation. Drawing on the tradition of *imitatio* (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 64–75) and the conceptualization of mimesis as (realistic) representation, he asks after the limits of artistic

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representation in the arts and seeks to reformulate humanity's dependency on God amid modernity.

To put a finger on such an elusive concept as mimesis in such a complex thinker as Kierkegaard is a doubly difficult task. In my attempt to explicate the place of mimesis in Kierkegaard's writing, then, I will build on three methodological approaches. First, thinking about mimesis in Kierkegaard, I draw on the work of Stephen Halliwell, and I take into account the three main facets of mimesis that Halliwell (2002: 15) identifies in his work: imitation, representation, and enactment (emulation or performance)—all of which are visual and behavioral.³ My second approach is genealogical-conceptual; it focuses on the formation of concepts across time in various disciplines, seeking to demonstrate their plural and sometimes ambivalent usages in various contexts. Consequently, my reading investigates the concept of mimesis in relation to other related concepts. In that methodology, I follow Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of "family resemblance." Just as no particular thing is common to all uses of the word "game," so mimesis does not have one core feature. Third, to tackle the Janus-faced concept of mimesis, I follow the approach set out by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in his *Typography* (1998). Highlighting the difficulties in defining mimesis as a concept, Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that it is more productive to analyze mimesis as being operative in particular contexts or phenomena. Lacoue-Labarthe maintains that to seek out definitive and conclusive definitions of mimesis is futile, and he warns against trying to generalize the meaning of mimesis from given mimetic phenomena since mimesis surpasses all cases where it is operative. In that sense, I will consider such concepts as genius, creativity, mirroring, desire, violence, model, and example, as well as a variety of mimetic terms used by Kierkegaard in his works.

Much of my work in this book is of an exegetical nature. I frequently quote from Kierkegaard's pseudonymous and signed works and his journals to let these texts speak for themselves, but also to let the readers be acquainted with the larger contexts in which I make my claims. Often considering well-known texts from new angles, I unearth mimetic subjects that have escaped the attention of scholars renowned for working on them. I also draw attention to Kierkegaard's works that are rarely considered by Kierkegaardians, extracting from them unique insights about Kierkegaard's knowledge of the mimesis discourse.

The lack of a systematic approach to mimesis on the part of Kierkegaard, true of his treatment of many crucial topics in his authorship, essentially requires work of reconstruction and conceptual investigation. Although at times he offers sustained analyses of various aspects of mimesis or mimetic themes in his writings, many of Kierkegaard's most pertinent observations are articulated in unassuming contexts or in passing when commenting on apparently unrelated issues. Furthermore, Kierkegaard's references to mimesis are often packed with multiple meanings.

I frequently return to the same passages in different chapters to extract from them information that is relevant to the discussed aspect of Kierkegaard's engagement with mimesis.

The Danish language does not offer a direct translation of the Greek *mimesis* into a noun. The key Danish term in this context is *Efterfølgelse*, which is a translation of the Latin term *imitatio*, itself the translation of *mimesis*. *Efterfølgelse* is used, for instance, in the title of the Danish editions of Thomas à Kempis's *De imitatione Christi*. The famous Danish Dictionary *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* (Society for Danish Language and Literature 1918–1956) situates *Efterfølgelse* predominantly in the Christian tradition that portrays Christ as the ideal and example for imitation. The term can be literally translated into English as “following after.” Its usage as the equivalent for “imitation” declined in modern Danish on account of other words appearing such as *Efterligne*, which would be literally translated into English as “likening after.” Kierkegaard uses both terms, but *Efterfølgelse* is most common in his work. The frequency of his employment of various mimetic terms, with special emphasis on *Efterfølgelse*, increases considerably in his output from 1848 to 1855. However, his mimetic vocabulary is impressive and far wider than has been acknowledged in the literature.

Kierkegaard uses a variety of terms to refer to the broad mimetic sphere in his corpus, such as *Gjentagelsen* (repetition), *Ligne* (likeness, and to liken, to resemble), *Lighed* (similarity and equality), *Sammenligning* (comparison), *Eftergjøre* (going and doing after), *Efterabelse* (aping or parroting), *mimisk* (mimic or mimical), but also *Fordoublelse* (redoubling), *Reduplikation* (reduplication), *Dobbelt-Reflexion* (double-reflection), *Dobbelthed* (doubleness or duplexity), *Dobbelt-Bevægelse* (double-movement), *Billede* (image or picture), and *Forbillede* (prototype, model, type, pattern). Most of these terms will be considered more closely in Chapter 4. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, the majority of these notions have certain mimetic qualities of doubleness and “referentiality” built into them. For example, when we compare, we compare something with something else. Similarly, likeness makes reference to something outside of itself. Likewise, doing-after-someone refers to “a someone,” and reduplication is a new instance of something other.

Crucial for this study is an accurate and wide-ranging understanding of Kierkegaard's employment of “image” and “prototype,” and the unique relationship between the two. One of the translations of *Forbillede* into English is “prototype.” The aptness of this translation derives predominantly from the fact that while the Danish *Forbillede* includes *Billede*, the English “prototype” includes “type.” Otherwise, this translation is problematic if we think about how Kierkegaard uses *Forbillede* in relation to the supermodel for imitation, the super image, Christ. “Prototype” denotes something primary but not fully valuable, like a preliminary model of something. Often, we associate prototype with a means of testing before

we devise something on a large scale or in a more complete form. As a prototype can be improved upon, thinking of Christ as the prototype is highly problematic since it suggests possible improvements upon Christ and His (salvific) work; such an idea seems rather irreconcilable with Kierkegaard's theology. The translation of *Forbillede* as "pattern" is more promising and seems to be in general agreement with Kierkegaard's intuition about *Forbillede*. "Pattern" renders Him complete and whole; it also works well with Kierkegaard's metaphor for imitation as an act of walking and following in someone's footsteps; following after a prototype seems *recondite* and less intuitive.

Kierkegaard's *Billede* also poses some conceptual headaches. Charged with the theological connotations of Christ being the image of God and the philosophical discourse on representation in the arts, "image" generates problems with regard to the relation between the aesthetic and the religious in Kierkegaard's thought. Considering the image as already a representation of something other challenges us to rethink the problem of the representation of the religious in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous and signed writings.

Theses and Chapters

This book is comprised of seven chapters. They provide a sustained account of Kierkegaard's complex engagement of mimesis in his authorship. They expose the richness and intricacy of mimesis in Kierkegaard's thought. Moreover, these chapters present Kierkegaard as an important contributor to the debates about mimesis in his own time as well as an important point of reference for contemporary debates on mimesis.

Chapter 1, "Representation, Originality, Genius," investigates Kierkegaard's attempt to challenge the scholarly debate on three important mimetic problems of modernity: representation, originality, and genius. The first part presents Kierkegaard as a thinker probing the limits of artistic representation, which he finds in art's inability to represent the religious dimension of suffering. Drawing on the notion of ekphrasis in Lessing, I indicate a paradoxical instance of religious aesthetics in Kierkegaard's representation of the image of the dead Christ that is deeply problematic for his view of art's inability to genuinely represent the religious dimension of suffering. The second part demonstrates Kierkegaard's strategic engagement of mimesis to challenge the modern ideal of an autonomous human self. I present Kierkegaard's criticism of the notions of originality, creativity, and genius as rooted in the modern debate between authority and freedom that draws on two contrasting renderings of mimesis: faithful imitation *of* a model, and creative production *from* the independent and self-sufficient self. I argue that Kierkegaard's voice in the debate is univocally critical of a naive appraisal of the creative originality of genius, which he sees as being

conditioned by society and therefore not as autonomous and original as modern notions might imagine.

Chapter 2, “Repetition, Recollection, Time, Meaning,” offers a reading of two of Kierkegaard’s fundamental concepts in relation to mimesis, namely repetition and recollection. After elucidating the apparent, but often overlooked, mimetic dimension of both concepts, I explore Kierkegaard’s mimetic thematization of the human experience of living a time-oriented life in the world of similarities, copies, and reiterations. I also argue that mimesis discloses a more wholesome account of human existence in Kierkegaard, which integrates its normative dimension of morality with a more general commitment to human integrity and the unity of life. Kierkegaard calls this dynamic a life-view. After initially focusing on *Repetition* to explicate Kierkegaard’s usage of the categories of repetition and recollection as qualifying existential notions of movement, imagination, and time, I then elucidate the religious breadth of repetition and present recollection as a failed repetition. The next part analyzes *A Literary Review* and *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* to show Kierkegaard’s engagement of repetition and recollection to conceptualize such categories of existence as time, life-view, and metamorphosis. A more nuanced reading of these works sets repetition and recollection in a dialectical relation of interdependency, considerably reevaluating recollection against its reading in *Repetition*, and argues for its primacy in the earnest art of acting.

Chapter 3, “Selfhood, Text, Redoubling,” expounds Kierkegaard’s radically mimetic reading of the structure and formation of human selfhood that develops in relation to autobiographical and non-autobiographical narratives of the self. The first part shows that Kierkegaard’s instances of textual self-(re)presentation do not simply give accounts of the author’s life but contribute to the formation of his actual existence. It presents Kierkegaard’s efforts at self-imitation as instances of a modern understanding of mimesis where life emulates art, contrary to the classic rendering of the concept, where art represents life. In the second part I engage the thought of Aristotle and Ricoeur to demonstrate that the idea of the mimetic-existential relationship between author, text, and reader that underwrites the mimetic formation of human selfhood in Kierkegaard is present in his concepts of redoubling and reduplication. Through these concepts, I argue, Kierkegaard accounts for the mimetic foundation of the moral self, which redoubles and reduplicates *externally* the *internal* world of beliefs.

Chapter 4, “Imitation,” the central part of this book, offers a critical exposition of the dominant facet of mimesis in Kierkegaard: imitation. It challenges the customary (mis)readings of imitation in Kierkegaard that fundamentally tie it with the Christian phenomenon of *imitatio Christi*. The first section of the chapter opens with a brief overview of the relevant literature on imitation and points out several canonical issues that have plagued Kierkegaardian scholarship on imitation. The second part

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offers a systematic exposition of four of the words Kierkegaard uses to denote imitation—namely *Eftergjøre*, *Efterligne*, *Lighed*, and *Ligne*. A close analysis of these terms, heretofore largely ignored in the scholarship, offers an insight into the reasons behind Kierkegaard's growing dissatisfaction with their connotations that are essentially unsuitable to grasp the meaning encapsulated in the word *Efterfølgelse*. The final part engages the Socratic vision of imitation understood as “following after” and Kant's distinction between *Nachäffung*, *Nachmachung*, *Nachahmung* and *Nachfolge* to contrast Kierkegaard's radically negative valuation of *Efterabelse* against *Efterfølgelse*, another two important terms from his mimetic vocabulary.

Chapter 5, “The Prototypes,” focuses on another important word from Kierkegaard's mimetic vocabulary, *Forbillede*. Engaging the notions of *figura* and *exemplum*, the first part of this chapter argues for the plurality of prototypes of existence in Kierkegaard, effectively challenging the customary approach to Christ as being the sole model of authentic life. The second part provides an exposition of mimetic models external to an individual self that I identify in Kierkegaard's account of the figures of Socrates, Abraham, Job, and “the woman who was a sinner” from the Gospel of Luke. The last part of the chapter presents Kierkegaard's internal mimetic models that I identify in his philosophical concepts of the ideal self and the ideal Christian embedded in his notion of “an image of the ideal Christian.” This chapter ends with an attempt to reconstruct from Kierkegaard's works a negative prototype identified in the person of Kierkegaard.

Chapter 6, “Affect, Admiration, Crowd,” systematizes and analyzes Kierkegaard's insightful remarks on human affectivity in relation to moral emotions, body, contagion, and collectivity. Following a brief outline of the conceptualization of affects and human affectivity from Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Silvan Tomkins, and Brian Massumi, the first part zooms in on empathy and sympathy in two important precursors of Kierkegaard, namely David Hume and Adam Smith. The second part argues for Kierkegaard's distinctively affective reading of admiration, which I locate in its being fundamentally linked with other emotions such as envy, but also in its being oriented toward the mediocre and base, having a limited motivational capacity, and being highly contagious. Affective admiration is then related to the contemporary discussion on moral exemplars, posing a challenge to the view of the epistemological and moral trustworthiness of admiration in moral exemplarity espoused primarily by Linda Zagzebski. The third part centers on the affective character of Kierkegaard's crowd psychology. Therein I examine his critical remarks on human collectivity, focusing on such key concepts from his social and political philosophy as “crowd” and “the public.” Reading his philosophy alongside two French theorists of mass society, Gabriel Tarde and René Girard, I draw out Kierkegaard's great interest in such mimetic terms as magnetism, fascination, somnambulism, scapegoating, and violence.

Chapter 7, “Comparison, Existential Mimesis, Authenticity,” concludes the book with a positive conceptualization of mimesis that responds to Kierkegaard’s multifaceted evaluation of this notion laid out throughout the book. The chapter opens with an exposition of Kierkegaard’s moral psychology of comparison to demonstrate the radically mimetic foundations of the religious and nonreligious underpinnings of this harmful phenomenon. Reading this concept in parallel with Social Comparison Theory discloses the noncognitive dimension of motivation engendered by comparison. Largely reconstructed from Kierkegaard’s positive and negative remarks on the influence of mimesis on the individual and social, but also religious and secular spheres of human life, I present a concept of existential mimesis that comprises five interrelated facets. Existential mimesis is “nonimitative,” “refigurative,” “non-comparing,” indirect, and intention-driven. Finally, I present habit and primitivity as notions that are crucial to Kierkegaard’s project of human authenticity in relation to mimesis. My analysis of habit shows that what makes us inauthentic is not only a repetition of sameness or a radical modification in the self, but a change that gradually and inconspicuously alters it. Being the fundamental property of the singular self, primitivity secures the authenticity of the human self against habit by offering a creative engagement with the world of ideas, allowing one to recommit to values and principles that are crucial to the uniqueness of every human being.

Notes

- 1 Another example is Hans L. Martensen, a main intellectual driving force behind an implementation of the speculative thought in Copenhagen, who spent his formative years in Germany (see, for instance, Thompson 2009).
- 2 “Mimesis makes it possible for individuals to step out of themselves, to draw the outer world into their inner world, and to lend expression to their interiority” (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 2).
- 3 In fact, Halliwell enumerates five categories of *mimesis*, of which I consider visual resemblance, behavioral imitation and emulation, and enactment: “first, visual resemblance (including figurative works of art); second, behavioral emulation/imitation; third, impersonation, including dramatic enactment; fourth, vocal or musical production of significant or expressive structures of sound; fifth, metaphysical conformity, as in the Pythagorean belief, reported by Aristotle, that the material world is a mimesis of the immaterial domain of numbers” (Halliwell 2002: 15).

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1 Representation, Originality, Genius

Representation is among the three fundamental meanings of *mimesis* conceptualized in classical Greece. The other two are “imitation” and “expression.” While hard to pinpoint as a concept, Gebauer and Wulf render representation through its function of “making present” according to the principles of similarity and truth (1995: 39). Genuine representation, they maintain in their seminal *Mimesis: Culture, Art, Society*, occurs when it is based on correspondence and when it is centered on morally desirable objects (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 25–37). Moreover, true representation is also concerned with its forms, manners, and modes. Both sets of themes—normativity and correspondence, and form and mode—lay at the foundation of aesthetics understood as a philosophical discipline. The modern return to aesthetics zooms in on the epistemological and moral value of aesthetic experience and on aesthetics understood as a theory of representation. It is indeed imperative for the moderns to understand representation for their quest to delineate the sort of philosophically valid truths that can be conveyed in, and derived from, aesthetic experience. Hence, they ask questions such as: What exactly is representation as such? What does it mean to represent an X? What can be represented? How can one best represent an X?

In this opening chapter, I present Kierkegaard as a thinker who joins the modern conversation on mimesis understood as concerned with the problem of representation. I pay attention to two problems relating to representation in two main sections of this chapter. In “Aesthetics, Ekphrasis, Suffering,” I focus on Kierkegaard’s exploration of the limits of artistic representation against central views in this area. Therein, I investigate and reconstruct Kierkegaard’s view of art’s inability to represent the religious dimension of suffering. By aligning his argument behind this radical separation of the aesthetic and the religious with Lessing’s account of ekphrasis exemplified in his iconic *Laocoön*, I show a paradoxical instance of religious aesthetics in Kierkegaard’s visual and verbal representations of the sufferings and death of Christ. I conclude that Kierkegaard’s puzzling

example of this religious representation ultimately challenges his view of the radical separation of the religious and the aesthetic.

In the second section of this chapter, “Originality, Genius, Creativity,” I shift my focus from the artwork to its author, inquiring about his or her status as a creator. I follow Kierkegaard’s contribution to an important discussion about mimesis, creativity, and originality epitomized in a conversation about the status of genius and talent among his contemporaries. Sketching the modern transition from an understanding of mimesis as realistic representation to one of creativity, I present Kierkegaard’s critique of the modern ideal of robust autonomy as a background to his ambivalent account of originality and genius in his authorship.

The main aim of this opening chapter, on the one hand, is to reveal the representational and thus, to a large extent, the aesthetic breadth of Kierkegaard’s engagement with mimesis. I demonstrate here that a thorough analysis of the form and the means of presentation of the religious reveals that the aesthetic and the religious in Kierkegaard are not mutually exclusive but interconnected. On the other hand, I show that the form and means of presentation in Kierkegaard greatly influence the reception of that which is made present in his works. That is to say, Kierkegaard’s various attempts at representation are not value-neutral. Rather, they are deliberately structured to steer the recipient (or reader) toward particular tasks.

1.1 Aesthetics, Ekphrasis, Suffering

One of the most influential works on Kierkegaard’s aesthetics is Theodor Adorno’s *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*. Published in 1933, Adorno’s *habilitation* sensitizes us to the equivocity behind Kierkegaard’s “aesthetic.” Adorno distinguishes three senses of “aesthetic” in Kierkegaard. In the first sense, “aesthetic” refers to “the realm of art works and the theory of art” (Adorno 1989: 14). In the second sense, it pertains to a sphere of human existence that is characterized by human indecisiveness and a sensuous and disinterested attitude toward the world. The third meaning of “aesthetic” can only be located in Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Adorno indicates that in its third sense, “aesthetic” signifies a discrete mode of inward existence.

While some other meanings of “aesthetic” have been identified in the literature (Ziolkowski 1992: 45n42), the first two meanings of the term identified by Adorno have since become somewhat canonical in the scholarship. They are, for instance, retained in George Pattison’s (1991) distinction between *aesthetics* and *the aesthetic* in Kierkegaard. Analogously to Adorno’s first sense of “aesthetic,” “aesthetics” in Pattison’s view means a theory of representation in the arts, while “the aesthetic” “is used as an ethical term to describe the life which fails to live up to its ethical potential” (Pattison 1991: 140).

As my aim here is to argue for a particular aesthetic-religious puzzle, which is an instance of a religious aesthetics in Kierkegaard, it will be helpful to identify key meanings of what he terms the “religious” in his authorship. Useful in that respect is a distinction made by Lee C. Barrett (2016) in his entry on “Religious/Religiousness” in *Kierkegaard’s Concepts*. The first distinctive meaning of “religious” in Kierkegaard is what Barrett defines as a “[m]ode of human experience ... [typical of] religious life” (2016: 213). The second meaning pertains to a type of human existence in the world that is characterized by “the pursuit of ... absolute fulfilment that the world cannot provide” and by the imperative of “becoming an individual before God” (Barrett 2016: 215). In combination, these two main renderings of “aesthetic” and “religious” make up two antinomies. On the one hand, we have two radically opposed spheres of existence: the religious and the aesthetic. On the other hand, two types of human experience are contrasted: one pertains to the objects of art; the other is specific to the religious type of existence in the world.

Scholars have argued that the radical opposition between the religious and the aesthetic on both levels represents Kierkegaard’s final word in the discussion on the limits of the representational value of art. With respect to the themes of representation and experience, Kierkegaard states that art cannot represent the domain of the religious without inescapably reducing the religious to the aesthetic. Taking suffering as paradigmatically religious, Kierkegaard claims that the religious is the artistically nonrepresentational that must be individually experienced. It cannot be represented artistically; it can be represented only in one’s life, and hence it must be lived out.

To better understand Kierkegaard’s view on religious aesthetics, it is important to briefly sketch the intellectual debate on which he builds, and to which he contributes. This backdrop will help us appreciate the radical nature of Kierkegaard’s thesis of the separation of the aesthetic and the religious, and what I identify as an aesthetic-religious puzzle in his authorship. While I present Gotthold Ephraim Lessing as the main point of departure for Kierkegaard’s view of aesthetics, I also account for prominent views in that area held by two groups of thinkers. First, I introduce the views of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, Moses Mendelssohn, and Johann Joachim Winckelmann. In the second group I include the views generally attributed to the German Romantics and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Of relevance here is the relation between aesthetics and such prominent themes of Kierkegaard’s view of religion and the religious life as ugliness, suffering, and pain, and the underlying question of art’s capacity to represent them.

1.1.1 Aesthetic Experience, Beauty, Art

The author of the first definition of aesthetics in philosophy, Baumgarten (1714–1762), indicates that aesthetics is about the beautiful and the role

of aesthetics is the stimulation of affects in the receiver of objects of art. Privileging poetry, Baumgarten states that human affects are stimulated by images that are created in and conjured by the recipients of poetry. Good art avoids the stimulation of negative feelings such as the feeling of displeasure and unhappiness. He says, “The aim of aesthetics is the perfection of sensible cognition as such, that is, beauty, while its imperfection as such, that is, ugliness is to be avoided” (Baumgarten 1970: 6).

To this thesis we have a thought-provoking response from Mendelssohn (1729–1786). In his *Rhapsody*, Mendelssohn points out that the ugly can in fact be represented artistically in such a way that the representation may be considered as being of value. He says, “The representation of what is evil is itself an element of the soul’s perfection and brings with it something quite pleasant that we by no means would prefer not to feel than to feel” (Mendelssohn 1997: 134). What Mendelssohn means is that we enjoy the arousal of emotions, the mental activity of apprehending the perfection in representation, even if the object represented is not beautiful. However, Mendelssohn cautions that the observer must keep a distance from objects of art as they can overwhelm the observer who may become somewhat overpowered by the object:

If the object gets too close to us, if we regard it as a part of us, or even as ourselves, the pleasant character of the representation completely disappears, and the relation to the subject immediately becomes an unpleasant relation to us since here subject and object collapse, as it were, into one another.

(Mendelssohn 1997: 134)

For Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), art seeks beauty and avoids suffering and violence. In his *Essays on the Philosophy and History of Art*, Winckelmann takes the subject of Laocoön to say that the sculpture of Laocoön is emblematic of the Greek ideal of harmony between agony and nobility because it keeps the balance between Laocoön being in pain (expression on the outside) and his nobility (the quality of the soul). Laocoön does not scream uncontrollably like a real dying person would, but he suffers in moderation, which is emblematic of his noble nature. Beauty needs expression (“which in art ... signifies imitation of the active and passive state of the mind and body, and of the passions as well as the actions”; Winckelmann 1849: 355); without expression, beauty is “insignificant.” Yet, the relationship between them must be harmonious. Thus, “stillness is the state most proper to beauty” for Winckelmann (1849: 356).

The Romantics decisively elevated art above all other realms of human activity. Art had a higher status than philosophy, religion, and the sciences. This reevaluation of aesthetics capitalized on a long tradition of its emancipation from religion. It was also motivated by a strong reaction to the treatment of aesthetics in the Enlightenment by the likes of

Baumgarten, Mendelssohn, and Winckelmann, among others. To the question whether art can represent the religious, some Romantic thinkers, as Frederick Burwick argues, would respond with positive enthusiasm. In his *Mimesis and Its Romantic Reflections*, Burwick indicates that for the equation to work, we need three elements: the creative-genial “I” of the artist; the ideal of suffering; and the material of the artwork (2001). In *The Heartfelt Outpouring of an Art-Loving Monk*, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773–1798) establishes a new level of the connectedness of art and religion. This intellectual representative of Early Romanticism, who greatly influenced Ludwig Tieck and died at the age of just 24, declares art “a mysterious sign language of God” (Wackenroder, cited in Wellek 1981: 90). Following suit, “the Romantics tended to consecrate art as a religion” (Ziolkowski 1992: 38).

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) is especially attentive to aesthetics concerned with representation. In his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, Hegel focuses on the relation between aesthetics and philosophy, dedicating less attention to its links with religion. He defines aesthetics as “*Philosophy of Art* and, more definitely, *Philosophy of Fine Art*” (Hegel 1975: 1).¹ Still, to fulfill its task, art needs to be placed “in the same sphere as religion and philosophy [as it is] simply one way of bringing to our minds and expressing the *Divine* ... and the most comprehensive truths of the spirit” (Hegel 1975: 7). Art, religion, and philosophy are different expressions of the same thing, called respectively: Idea, Absolute Mind, and Spirit. According to Eric Ziolkowski, “For Hegel, art is the sensuous appearance [*Schein*] of Absolute Mind; religion in general represents or pictures Absolute Mind in a quasi-imaginative form [*Vorstellung*]; while philosophy, as the highest expression of Absolute Mind, conceives or thinks it” (1992: 36). Exploring the links between religion and aesthetics, Hegel does not commit to any particular religion, as William Desmond notes (1986: 40). Desmond indicates that Hegel’s non-confessional thinking about religion entails that art as the object of aesthetics transcends religion: “art points beyond exclusively aesthetic considerations to a further religious significance” (Desmond 1986: 37).

In his conceptualization of art, Hegel draws especially on Romantic and classical art. These models are built around competing renderings of mimesis, which Hegel combines. The pivotal concept for classical art is mimesis understood not only as imitation of a model, but also as realistic representation. Classical art is about representing some original, hence producing copies. So understood, classical art has been readily accessible for Christian religious purposes as it was fixed on representing the transcendent realms of God and religious truths. This view was strongly criticized by the Romantics, as such a view put art in the service of religion. Romantic art embraces mimesis understood as creativity. A modern artist creates new originals. Following the principle of *l’art pour l’art*, art serves no other purpose than itself. Siding with the Romantic

understanding of art based on the principle of creativity, Hegel avoids the dualism of the copy and original. Representation in art is redefined into, on the micro scale, non-substantial self-articulation of the artist, and on the macro scale, the self-articulation of *Geist* (Desmond 1986: 8, 22).

1.1.2 *Lessing, Aesthetics, Ekphrasis*

Lessing's (1729–1781) view of the relation between art and religion is that both have their distinct and largely irreconcilable territories. Art should not be concerned with the religious. His firm position on the disjunction of both domains harkens back to art's emancipation from religion affirmed by his interlocutors Baumgarten, Mendelssohn, and Winckelmann. I claim here that Lessing is largely behind Kierkegaard's view that religious suffering cannot be represented in the arts. However, unsurprisingly to anyone acquainted with Kierkegaard, his relation to Lessing is ambivalent.

While it is important to sketch Lessing's view of aesthetics more broadly before demonstrating his influence on Kierkegaard, I would like very briefly to indicate the ambivalence of Kierkegaard's relation to Lessing regarding aesthetics. On the one hand, to Lessing's claim that art should not represent religion because art should not serve any other purpose but itself, Kierkegaard responds that art is unable to represent the religious. Kierkegaard "converts" art's superiority over religion to its inferiority; thus, he designates the limits of aesthetics. On the other hand, and this is where the religious-aesthetic puzzle lies, after appropriating and redefining Lessing's conceptualization of ekphrasis, Kierkegaard uses it to actually say something contrary to what he programmatically maintains about the limits of aesthetics. More specifically, in contrast to Kierkegaard's firm claims that art cannot represent the religious dimension of suffering, the approach taken in his work amounts exactly to this: representing the religious *via* the artistic means of ekphrasis, which Kierkegaard effectively takes from Lessing.

Significantly contributing to the conversation about aesthetics in his time, Lessing focuses on determining the medium of art capable of representing the most beautiful and noble ideals. He pours out his thoughts in that regard in his most influential book: *Laocoön: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, published in 1766. The subject of Laocoön is discussed by many of Lessing's contemporaries. As I have already indicated, it is examined by Winckelmann in his essay "On the Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks," and it is mentioned in his monumental *History of the Art of Antiquity*. These considerations refer to a marble sculpture by an undetermined maker representing the story of a priest, Laocoön of Troy, and his two sons, strangled and fatally bitten by a sea serpent. The creature is sent by one of the gods to punish Laocoön for his attempt to warn the Trojans against accepting the notorious Trojan horse.

Lessing takes the sculpture to showcase his views of aesthetics. In the book, he sketches “new” rules of representation. First, to a large extent following his contemporaries, Lessing asserts that the goal of art is to display beauty; hence, art is irreconcilable with suffering. Second, aesthetics is its own goal; it does not serve other ends. As Lessing famously states, art is not merely “a handmaid of religion” (1962: 55). Third, aesthetics should display the individual character of the author and engage the subjectivity of the recipient. Fourth, the visual arts, such as painting and sculpture, are inferior to nonvisual arts, such as poetry. Here Lessing challenges the view of his contemporaries who perceived different media as equally expressive (*ut pictura poesis*), arguing that efficacious representation is possible through poetry, which is superior to the visual medium of painting and sculpture (Stafford 1999: 55).

Lessing’s reasons for making the latter claim are as follows. The visual type of representation, which Lessing calls “suggestion through bodies,” can represent an object in a single moment that is not the moment of culmination for the object (Lessing 1962: 78). It is so, as the representation must leave room for the observer’s imagination. The observer’s subjective engagement “completes” the artwork in imagination. An example of that we see precisely in the three stages of dying represented in the three “bodies” from the marble sculpture. Looking at the art piece, we see that, to the left, one of Laocoön’s sons is presented as already dead; in the middle, Laocoön is represented as just being bitten by the mythical sea serpent; the son to the right is watching on in horror as the whole story unfolds.

The nonvisual, which Lessing terms “suggestion through action,” is able to represent a succession of images in time, which it invokes in our imagination. The nonvisual means of representation engages our imagination and subjectivity on a deeper level than painting and sculpture by touching on our emotions. It cuts through our disinterested attitude toward “art.” However, as Winckelmann pointed out, art representing suffering and violence can be dangerous to us. It can overwhelm our subjectivity and imagination to such an extent that we can start to suffer ourselves. This indicates a form of contagion, sympathy, and affectivity inherent in art, which will then be deployed by Kierkegaard in his account of suffering and violence.

Such an affective outlook on aesthetics shapes Lessing’s conceptualization of ekphrasis. However, he at no point uses the word “ekphrasis” in *Laocoön*, and neither does he conform to its classical definition (Webb 2009: 5). As for its etymology, ekphrasis means “telling in full” (Heffernan 2008: 19n2). Following Heffernan, its classical meaning is “The verbal representation of visual representation” (1991: 297–316). Ekphrasis is at work when a physical object of art, such as a painting or a sculpture, gets its written account. A classical example of ekphrasis would be Homer’s description of Achilles’ shield—a recurring theme throughout the history of aesthetics.

22 *Representation, Originality, Genius*

Lessing's ekphrasis is concerned with four questions. First, what is the best way of representing specific objects? Second, can we determine the medium of representation that can make present the non-representable? Third, how do we account for the creativity of the artist in the represented object? Fourth, how do we influence the recipient of the artwork in such a way that allows her to be included in the production process of the artwork that eventually leads to her transformation?

Lessing finds the answer to these questions in the medium of poetry. Poetry requires thinking, writing, and reading; hence, it is stretched over time. Poetry stimulates in the recipient a level of imagination that produces in her a temporally structured world in which the recipient accommodates, "reconstructs," and "finishes" the received artwork. In that sense, in saying "imagine X," we mean "imagine the world where X exists." Moreover, the experience of representation in poetry changes the recipient. It penetrates the recipient's subjectivity. It does not bounce off a disinterested observer (Halliwell 2002: 120).

1.1.3 *Kierkegaard and Ekphrasis*

Kierkegaard is well aware of Lessing's contribution to aesthetics. In his "Silhouettes" from *Either/Or*, through the pseudonymous voice of "A," Kierkegaard gives a good account of Lessing's distinction between the visual and nonvisual media of art (EO1: 169/SKS 2: 167). While being generally sympathetic to Lessing in the first part of *Either/Or*, in its second part Kierkegaard seems to be more critical of the author of *Laocoön*. Therein, Kierkegaard focuses on demonstrating the limits of both visual and verbal arts. He claims that both media are unable to represent the truly Christian quality of humility, for instance, in contrast to their capacity to represent the qualities cherished in the secular realm of culture, such as honor, pride, bravery, and even romantic love. Humility's representation requires accounting for the sequential dimension of human existence, which is something no art can provide, according to Kierkegaard. He says:

Humility is hard to portray precisely because it is sequence, and whereas the observer needs to see pride only at its climax, in the second case he really needs to see something that poetry and art cannot provide, to see its continuous coming into existence, for it is essential to humility to come into existence continuously.

(EO2: 135/SKS 3: 134)

Kierkegaard's second critical point is that the arts' attempts to represent religion have serious shortcomings. Kierkegaard obviously has the Christian religion in mind. More specifically, the problem with representation of the Christian religion is that artists misunderstand what it is.

He says that art “portrayed Christ as the image of patience,” but claims that this portrayal misses the point. Christ should be portrayed not in patience, which falls back on the Greek ideal of moderation, but in the intensity of suffering. We see moderation on the face of Laocoön, which, following Winckelmann, expresses his internal beauty and dignity, so crucial to classical Greek works. However, Kierkegaard sees Christ’s death as violent and ugly. It communicates prolonged, dehumanizing suffering, rather than beauty and moderation. “Long-suffering cannot be portrayed artistically, for the point of it is incommensurable with art; neither can it be poetized, for it requires the protraction of time,” according to Kierkegaard (EO2: 136/SKS 3: 135).

Kierkegaard’s criticism of Lessing’s view of the arts is further confirmed in his vehement critique of the relation between Christianity and aesthetics in his second authorship. In *Practice in Christianity*, Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous author Anti-Climacus famously calls Christian art “new paganism” (PC: 254/SKS 12: 246).

Yet, Kierkegaard’s relation to Lessing and his view of the relation between aesthetics and religion are much more complicated than one might at first think. A careful reading of Kierkegaard’s treatment of representation discloses a nuanced account of his appraisal of the representation of the religious that, as I argue, is in fact influenced by Lessing’s ekphrasis. Put differently, Kierkegaard’s reading of the religious seems partially compatible with Lessing’s ekphrasis. My contention here is that Kierkegaard is not deadly fixed on the idea of art’s inability to represent Christ; rather, he is critical of the typical ways of doing so in the arts.

To the question “Can Christ be represented?” which Kierkegaard does not ask verbatim, he responds positively. In fact, he presents a set of very specific instructions emphasizing this point: “He [Christ] must not be represented in any other way [*han skal ikke fremstilles anderledes*]” (PC: 175/SKS 12: 177). Taking seriously Lessing’s concern for representation of the nonrepresentational *via* ekphrasis, Kierkegaard does three things. First, moving away from Lessing’s stressing of the superiority of one medium over the other (poetry over painting and sculpture), Kierkegaard takes a synergistic approach to both media. Second, following Lessing, Kierkegaard includes the recipient’s imagination in representation. Third, again following Lessing, Kierkegaard stresses the importance of representation in changing the recipient of the artwork. These three features can be found in Anti-Climacus’s *Practice in Christianity* and H.H.’s essay “Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?” As I will now demonstrate, Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authors engage them especially in corresponding accounts of a young child in both works, which Kierkegaard wrote with the apparent intention that they would complement one another.

The synergistic approach to the visual and the spoken media in Anti-Climacus’s *Practice in Christianity* is evident in the author’s attempts

to engage the reader with both types of representation of the suffering and humiliated Christ. While Anti-Climacus refers independently to both media when it comes to the representation of Christ, he also indicates that they are closely interrelated and form a kind of dialectical pair of verbal-visual, which elsewhere I call a spoken-picture (Kaftanski 2014: 110–129). With regard to the spoken or verbal representations of Christ's life and death in *Practice in Christianity*, we encounter multiple references to *the story* of the life and death of Christ, but also to the act of *telling* and *listening* to the story. One passage in particular zeros in on the significance of the representation of Christ's life in a story: "This story [*Historie*], that is, the story [*Historien*] of this continual mistreatment that finally ends in death, this story [*Historie*], or this suffering, is the story [*Historie*] of his life" (PC: 168/SKS 12: 171). A few lines later, the author clarifies the manner in which the story must be told: "In no other way except in one of these two can [the story] be told" (PC: 168/SKS 12: 171).

The pictorial dimension of the representation also refers to Christ's suffering and abasement. The whole of section III.III of *Practice in Christianity* opens with a prayer that tellingly invokes "The image of you [Christ] in your abasement" (PC: 167/SKS 12: 170). Other references in this section talk about creating a mental picture of Christ's humiliation and degradation. For instance, "Picture to yourself this abased one"; "look once again at the abased one!" The synergy of word and image can be seen in cases where Anti-Climacus refers to the activity of *telling a picture*, or describing what is represented in the picture, hence following the classical definition of ekphrasis, of re-representing in words what already has a visual representation.

This synergistic approach to both media is especially present in reference to the example of a child who is being exposed to stories about, and images of, the suffering and crucified Christ. We read Anti-Climacus urging his readers, "Then tell the child that this crucified one is the Savior of the world"; "Tell the child what happened to him [Christ] ... as shown in the picture ... Tell it very vividly" (PC: 175–176/SKS 12: 178).

Such synergistic representation of Christ also appears in another pseudonymous work "Does a Human Being Have the Right Let Himself be Put to Death for the Truth?" Written by a mysterious H.H., this essay picks up the subject of a child exposed from an early age to an image of the tortured and degraded Christ. While H.H. focuses mainly on the pictorial representation of Christ, especially at the beginning of the essay, he indicates that while the child has not heard the typical children's stories about Christ during his upbringing, "the Crucified One [Christ] had been all the more frequently depicted to him; therefore this picture was the one and only impression he had of the Savior" (WA: 55/SKS 11: 61).

Engaging the imagination in the recipient of the artwork and changing the recipient are two key examples in which Kierkegaard follows Lessing's take on ekphrasis. We find multiple references to the employment of the

reader's imagination in *Practice in Christianity*, less so in H.H.'s essay. Anti-Climacus either instructs us to conjure in our imagination a mental picture of Christ in his abasement or commands us to take a step back and invent figures and potential courses of actions that these figures would undertake. Kierkegaard calls it *experimenting* (*Experimenterende*) in his other pseudonymous work, *Repetition*. One such figure the author wants us to *experiment* is the child ("Imagine [*Tænk*] a child"; PC: 174/SKS 12: 176).

Another telling example of Anti-Climacus having recourse to the imagination of the reader comes earlier on in section III, part II. Therein, the author explicates the paradoxical and dialectical nature of Christ's words about drawing his followers to himself after his death from John 12:32. Attempting the best "explanation" of the paradox, the author invites his readers to, in three steps, imagine a fictitious figure whose vicissitudes exemplify and "picture" the situation of Christ saying the words about drawing his followers up from on high. He says: "Let us imagine [*tænke*] a pious, poor man"; "Now, let us imagine that it did happen"; "Let us imagine that man, many years elapsed between the first and last period of his life" (PC: 162/SKS 12: 167).

The changing capacity of the representation in words and images in Anti-Climacus is especially contextualized in relation to the suffering and horror of Christ's life and death. The images of Christ in his humiliation and killing have an affective and tantalizing power over the feelings and motivations of individuals. The already-mentioned image of the abased Christ from the opening prayer of section III.III in *Practice in Christianity* is, indeed, "so awakening and persuasive, that we will feel ourselves drawn to you in lowliness, drawn to want to be like you in lowliness" (PC: 167/SKS 12: 170). The change that is affected in the individual is not only internal, but has an external dimension of action. In that regard, the text confronts the reader's response to the image. Anti-Climacus asks repeatedly the nagging and challenging question: "Is this sight not able to move you?" The expected response is obviously meant to be positive. The picture should disturb the reader-viewer and prompt in them a desire (and a disposition to want) to suffer replicating the suffering of Christ. The reader is also repeatedly asked by Anti-Climacus to "Look at him once again" (PC: 173, 174/SKS 12: 176). The anticipated response of the reader is both cognitive and noncognitive. Paradoxically, on the one hand, the author confirms that the reader is not "being compelled against [his] will," but on the other, he expects the reader to utter: "I cannot do otherwise, for this sight moves me" (PC: 171/SKS 12: 174), what suggests a diminished sense of volition.

Anti-Climacus believes that if one can "be" moved by the image of the suffering Christ to the imitation of His sufferings into one's life, then one is becoming a genuine Christian. His argument is that the reader's engagement with the synergistic representation of Christ's suffering

and death will affect a change in the reader because it did so with “the apostles ... and fathers and teachers of the church” (PC: 178/SKS 12: 180). Yet, part of the argument rests on the case of the imaginary child. The child is being constantly exposed to the spoken images of Christ abused. Continuing *experimenting* the child, Anti-Climacus repeatedly asks: “What effect do you think this story will have on a child?” “So what effect do you think this story would evoke in the child?” (PC: 176, 177/SKS 12: 178, 179).

The question is far from merely rhetorical. An answer is provided in H.H.’s “Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?” Therein, H.H. tells us that the effects of the child’s exposure to “the image of the crucified Christ” will result in the child’s development of an extraordinary relation to the picture, which, although of a mental character, will have physical effects on the child. Indeed, the child experiences an acceleration of time in his biological functions: “although a child, he was already old like an old man” (WA: 55/SKS 11: 61). These physical, hence largely affective, effects of the image on the child are imitative, unconscious, and yet ambiguous and violent. The child, who eventually becomes a man, is both attracted and repelled by the picture.

Kierkegaard further elaborates this uncanny experience of the child in an ephemeral interjection about a painter who develops an unusual relationship with a picture of a murdered man. Most likely the author of the painting, the painter cannot restrain himself from looking at the picture, which menacingly pursues and prosecutes him, as the Danish *forfulgte* suggests. This inexplicable relation between the painter and the painting is marked by an overpowering anxiety of conscience (*Samvittighedens Angest*) in the painter, which then is equated with the loving attitude of the child toward the picture of the crucified Christ. The child’s approach to the imagistic representation of Christ is far from an aesthetic attitude that is meant to produce pleasure, as per Baumgarten’s injunction. Contrary to Mendelssohn and Winckelmann, and following Lessing, the picture of the crucified Christ should evoke in the recipient the feeling of overwhelming discomfort and distress.

Kierkegaard’s picture has both divine and sacred as well as violent and profane dimensions, which correspond to the *mysterium fascinans*² of the divine-violent. Kierkegaard brings this about to establish a distinction between the sacred and the profane that becomes substantiated with one’s attitude to the story. Indeed, the picture is presented as prompting the observer to approach it with a specific mindset of openness and reverence, but also fear. The tension between divinity and violence in the painted picture opens the poetical possibility of the aesthetic profane that can be engaged in the hermeneutics of the picture. Following that, to first paint the picture and then to aesthetically approach it is considered by the artist to be ungodly.

Yet, this account of the picture of the crucified Christ in Kierkegaard suggests that the possibility of representing Christ artistically is not completely closed off. If so, here Kierkegaard somewhat follows Hegel by suggesting that, as I have already indicated, art transcends aesthetics and points toward the religious. The experience of the picture has an existential and mimetic dimension. The meaning of the picture is “becoming oneself the picture that resembled him” (WA: 55/SKS 11: 61). Subsequently, the imitation of the holy, of the high, and profound, also requires a mimesis of the violence and, in that sense, entails both martyrdom and the existential redoubling that is the foundation of the self. Fulfilling Mendelssohn’s major worry about perilously shortening the distance between the observer and the object of art, “the subject and object collapse ... into one another,” (1997: 134) and the recipient of the religious spoken picture becomes a picture himself. Artistic representation becomes a religious-existential imitation; this signal leads us toward a new concept of existential mimesis discussed in the concluding chapter of this book.

In this section, I have sought to elucidate the complexity of Kierkegaard’s engagement with the fundamental notion of mimesis, namely representation. I have demonstrated that Kierkegaard’s representation of Christ can be interpreted as having an aesthetic dimension. Such a contention presents readers of Kierkegaard with an aesthetic-religious puzzle that challenges the dominant view in respect of his radical distinction between the aesthetic and the religious. I have explored the aesthetic-religious puzzle by reading Kierkegaard’s account of the abased Christ represented in a spoken image alongside Lessing’s critical reception of ekphrasis. I have also demonstrated Kierkegaard’s ambivalent reception of Lessing. More specifically, whereas for Lessing the guiding task of aesthetics is to represent what is beautiful and harmonious, “the image of the crucified Christ” is ugly and represents violence and chaos. Moreover, contrary to Lessing’s prioritization of one artistic medium over another, the image of the suffering and crucified Christ in Kierkegaard is not reserved for one particular medium, but “consists of” various media. It is a spoken picture or, one could argue, a visualized narrative.

Consequently, “the image of the crucified Christ,” understood as the synergy and cooperation of various artistic media in the work of representing the idea, contests Lessing’s take on ekphrasis. Yet, following Lessing, Kierkegaard’s own engagement of ekphrasis concentrates on the effect that the image has on the recipient. Henceforth, Kierkegaard incorporates into his image of the crucified Christ Lessing’s theory of the role of the recipient in the imaginative process of the production of the image. To this theory Kierkegaard adds the religious-existential layer of the production of the image in the form of the Christian striving to experience the sufferings of Christ. This we see in the child’s becoming a martyr in the essay of H.H. following his exposure to the spoken-image

of the suffering and crucified Christ. In that sense, Kierkegaard confirms the very nature of mimesis that is concerned with the germination and multiplication of representations.

1.2 Originality, Genius, Creativity

In this section, I elaborate the mimetic dimension of three important concepts used by Kierkegaard, namely originality, genius, and creativity. This presentation situates Kierkegaard as participating in and contributing to the important discussion among his contemporaries concerning the relation between mimesis and creativity. My main source of material in Kierkegaard is the second essay from H.H.'s *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*—"The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle." While it seems as though the work is primarily concerned with the theological subject of revelation, reading it in relation to mimesis demonstrates an unacknowledged layer of Kierkegaard's theoretical criticism of the ideal of the modern self. More specifically, Kierkegaard is suspicious of the ideal of robust human autonomy, and he reacts against the harsh denigration of classical mimesis, both of which are central pillars of Enlightenment thinking. Kierkegaard's criticism of the modern ideal of the anti-mimetic, self-sufficient modern self serves as an introduction to his own conceptualization of the ideal self. In his criticism, Kierkegaard neither falls back on the classical meaning of mimesis as imitation nor dismisses its modern reconceptualization in the form of creativity. Rather, as I will only signal here, for Kierkegaard, our selfhood is mimetic in both senses. As I elaborate the mimetic self in Kierkegaard in Chapter 3, we need to understand it dialectically.

Kierkegaard's critique of the modern self in his pseudonymous "The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle" is very mimetic itself. It dialogues mimetically with several things at once. For instance, it reconceptualizes, hence creatively imitates, the modern discussion about the difference between talent and genius. It also appropriates the method of discernment and juxtaposition used by Plato in his judgment on the difference between the sophist and a genuine philosopher in the *Sophist*. In both cases, Kierkegaard is someone who imitates and changes at once. Paradoxically, this positions him as a modern thinker in relation to the scholarly discourse on mimesis. In order to show the more complex scale of Kierkegaard's appraisal of the problem in question, and also to shed new light on his understanding of the human self as essentially mimetic—as will be discussed in the following chapters—I will go back to the roots of the modern outlook on mimesis. The following short introduction to the relation of creativity and mimesis is important, as it presents Kierkegaard as a participant in the genius discourse, which can be properly understood in its historical context of the transitions from Antiquity to the Renaissance to Modernity.

1.2.1 *Mimesis, the Ancients, and the Moderns*

In his brief but highly informative account of the history of mimesis, Potolsky argues that the redefinition of mimesis from its initial sense of *imitation* to *originality* can be traced to the Roman Empire. As Horace notes, the Romans conquered the Greeks militarily, but in turn they were conquered by Greek culture. The great poet thus suggests: “Study Greek models day and night” (cited in Potolsky 2006: 52). Indeed, contemporary classical literary genres evolved through imitation of those forms of written expression first developed and practiced by Roman artists. This process of creating originals through imitation is termed in the literature as *translatio studii*, which in short means a transition of knowledge from one culture to another. This continuity of intellectual and cultural heritage is based on imitation that “makes the original an original, renders it a ‘classic’ and a model for further imitation” (Potolsky 2006: 52).

What stands out in such an interpretation is that to imitate is not simply to copy inherited forms and works of art, but also to change, rewrite, and parody them. A work of parody provokes laughter because it ensures that the object of parody (another work) is discernible to the audience; as a work it is both new and old. The Roman poets incorporated Greek art into their culture, but it was not a slavish assimilation. Rather, following Seneca’s reading of imitation, it would “both resemble and differ from its sources”—an apt example of this would be a child resembling his or her parents (Potolsky 2006: 57–58).

In the Renaissance, imitating and differing from the classical models was an ideal and a necessary means to marry the Gospel with pagan Western heritage. The Christian message was seen as a clear advancement upon the religious and ethical views of the Greek and Roman models. By standing on the shoulders of giants, the artists of the Renaissance saw farther and better: “The imitation of the ancients becomes an *imitatio Christi*, an imitation of Christ” (Potolsky 2006: 63). Additionally, the understanding of poetry in the Renaissance was significantly close to the late Roman consideration of mimesis. Renaissance artists therefore did not consider their role to consist merely in representing or mirroring nature, but rather in reaching beyond what nature offers. Such poetry does not inform or teach directly, as in Plato; following Aristotle, it develops and hence improves humans by supplying perfected images of nature and the human. By the end of the eighteenth century, *mimesis* inevitably became the subject matter of the famous debate over authority: the so-called *Querelle des Anciens et des Moderns* (The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns), which was most fervent in seventeenth-century France.³

Artists, philosophers, and professional academicians engaged with the question of how to interpret the advancement of modern science in relation to the knowledge of the ancients. The moderns argued that artists should not adhere to classical rules and standards of artistic production,

but instead go beyond them and establish their own criteria: “The primary criterion of literary quality gradually shifts from a concern with whether rules are being followed or broken to a *judgment of taste*” (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 109). An important, though often indirect, response to such a formulation is given by Kierkegaard’s “interlocutors” such as Kant, the Romantics, and Hegel.

Kant builds on Descartes, who, directly influenced by the *Querelle*, rejects the authority of the ancients. Descartes seeks authority in his own self and finds it on the path of doubt. To be a creative human being, one must listen only to one’s own reason; thus, to follow authority amounts to an abandonment of reason (Paganini 2008: 173). Kant’s progression from the critical thought of Descartes can be found in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, where he develops the idea of genius.⁴ Although genius is a product of nature, its action transcends nature: “Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art” (Kant 2000: 186). In her activity, genius does not adhere to any rules, because her production is original. Originality cannot be imitated; hence, genius cannot be imitated by genius (Gammon 1997). Kant says: “genius is a talent for producing that for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition of skill for that which can be learned in accordance with some rule, consequently that originality must be its primary characteristic” (2000: 186).⁵ The genius puts new *spirit* or *soul* into an artwork, by expressing at once the rational idea and its proper communicative form (Kant 2000: 191–196 [the whole of §49]; see also “Editor’s Introduction,” xxxiii); yet, finding the form requires talent (Bates 2004: 139). Kant famously states: “Everyone agrees that genius is entirely opposed to *the spirit of imitation*” (Kant 2000: 187). Imitation of any model is, in fact, aping (Kant 2000: 196).

One must acknowledge that not all kinds of imitation are entirely ruled out in relation to genius for Kant. As I elaborate in Chapter 4, Kant formulates four conceptualizations of imitation. He distinguishes between copying [*Nachmachung*], aping [*Nachäffung*], imitation [*Nachahmung*], and emulation or following [*Nachfolge*] in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*; it is the last type of imitation that is allowed between genius and genius. This is because, for Kant, *Nachfolge* has a motivational character. In relation to aesthetics, one genius can be motivated through, for instance, the genial capacities of the other. However, in relation to morality, “the true original [*das wahre Original*] ... is to be found only in our minds,” says Kant in the *First Critique* (Kant 2007: 311, A315/B372). Even Christ is not extraordinary in the moral sense; we cannot learn from him anything that is not accessible to human capacities. This means that for Kant, exemplars are not persons from whom we can learn about the virtues. Rather, exemplars are examples of the “doability” or “fulfillability” of the moral law that is contained in everyone’s reason.

The second important point of departure for Kierkegaard's consideration of the relation between mimesis and creativity is the authorship of "all the German books,"⁶ meaning generally the German Romantics, and more specifically figures such as Lessing and Schelling. While not a follower of Kant, Lessing upholds the "rationalist" dimension of aesthetics: "Who reasons correctly also invents, and who wishes to invent must be able to reason" (Lessing, cited in Kneller 2007: 42). Lessing is the first to associate genius with Shakespeare (and Goethe too, albeit with some reservations) for his ability to transcend the confines of ancient drama and to give a new form to theatrical expression (Wellek 1981: 157; Furst 1994: 12). For Lessing, a genius is "a born critic" who, far from disregarding all principles (Kneller 2007: 41), "has the proof of all rules within himself" (Lessing, cited in Wellek 1981: 170), as he is the one "who can produce out of himself, out of his own feelings" (Lessing, cited in Wellek 1981: 170). In his artistic production, a genius is able to conjure up a world that is intelligible, coherent, and structured around a clear teleology. In *Stages on Life's Way*, Kierkegaard confirms the claim that Shakespeare is in fact a genius. His reasons resonate with those offered by Lessing, but they also seem to be directed against Hegel. More specifically, Kierkegaard sees the genius of Shakespeare to be relevant both in his times and long after his death. Kierkegaard says:

On a specific point, one may have a doubt, another opinion, and yet agree on the one opinion that has been the opinion of one and two and three centuries—that Shakespeare stands unrivaled, despite the progress the world will make, that one can always learn from him, and the more one reads him, the more one learns.

(SLW: 454/SKS 6: 419)

While drawing on Kant, Schelling's take on genius adds a new dimension to the subject. Schelling unites thought and nature in the concept of genius by calling the former conscious and the latter unconscious. Schelling notes in his seminal *System of Transcendental Idealism*: "Now again if art comes about through two activities totally distinct from one another, genius is neither one nor the other, but that which presides over both" (Schelling 1997: 223). A genius expresses himself or herself primarily through artistic production that harnesses the determinacy of nature in harmony with the freedom of human action.⁷ Understood in this way, genius resolves the perennial contradiction in human being between conscious and unconscious nature, where the unconscious signifies both freedom and talent (Bates 2004: 139). In his dissertation for the master degree, *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard distances himself from Schelling's view in which the work of genius is expressed in both action and the musical arts; for Kierkegaard, the latter belongs to aesthetics, whereas action is the domain of ethics (Law 2013: 150).

As I have indicated in the first section of this chapter, Hegel's consideration of mimesis is ambivalent and complex. On the one hand, he is critical of mimesis as representation akin to classical art understood as imitation. Artistic representations of nature are inferior to their model, their original; as nature is "already present to us in its essential reality, imitation seems not to add anything significantly *new* to his prior presentation" (Desmond 1986: 5). On the other hand, the modern rendering of mimesis as the creation of new originals, or as imitating nature's creative power (*à la* Spinoza's and Coleridge's *natura naturans*), is to some extent problematic for Hegel. It alienates the creative individual from their mature environment of *Sittlichkeit*. For Hegel, genius is determined by the rationality of Spirit that it expresses; she is rooted not in nature, but in the objectivity of thought.

For Hegel, Kant's genius, the producer of aesthetic ideas, is Spirit reflecting itself in historical, concrete *Vorstellungen*. Genius is located in the movement of a merely subjective soul ... It is reflection, not genius, that is essential to the science of experience.

(Bates 2004: 140–141)

While for Schelling, genius is more than talent,⁸ for Hegel, the difference between the two is "abolished"; they are simply "natural endowments" that need to be "schooled." The status of genius is then somehow diminished in Hegel. For Hegel, true art needs genius as much as it needs talent; it requires reflection for its expression, not just as a mere means of presentation. As the capacity to think is present in every human being—an apparently Kantian remark—in Hegel, the categories of genius and talent eventually become dispensable. Hegel's dialectic does not end there. If genius has only a historical significance, as Hegel suggests, the category of genius is not far from being an artifice.

The modern criticism of mimesis led from the rejection of the mimesis-imitation of an artist to the elevation of the mimesis-creativity of a genius. This ultimately led to the annihilation of the genius in Hegel's dialectic of mimesis in the form of the pair imitation-creativity. Such a move, which is symptomatic of Hegel's dialectical approach to various philosophical problems, prompts Kierkegaard to the reflection that Hegel is the thinker with whom the age of making distinctions comes to an end (CA: 3/SKS 4:310). Endorsing Hegel's system would annul the difference between transcendence and immanence, as well as the difference between a genius and an ordinary person. The idea that everyone and no one is a genius, which might be the radical conclusion of Hegel's philosophy, stands in contradiction with how the German Romantics and Kierkegaard perceived genius.

Yet, this does not mean that the Romantics took positions identical to Kierkegaard's. Indeed, Hegel himself is not the only one in error

here for the Danish thinker. Thus, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous "The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle" emerges as a criticism of both Hegel's account of the mediocre self and the Romantic elevation of the extraordinary self. Expressed in its title, the essay's main prerogative is a restoration of the qualitative difference between people that he sees in the difference between an apostle and the rest of humankind. While Kierkegaard defends the idea of a particular type of difference between humans, the difference between a genius and ordinary people is not qualitative in the absolute sense, which would follow from the Romantic appraisal of the problem. Nonetheless, this does not mean that there is "no difference" between the genius and all other people, as Kierkegaard's reading of Hegel would suggest.

In the following section, I will refer to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous "The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle" to portray Kierkegaard, first, as a representative of the *translatio studii* tradition and, second, as a critic of the modern self.

1.2.2 *Translatio studii, mimesis, representation*

In his criticism of the Romantics and Hegel in H.H.'s second essay, Kierkegaard exemplifies the mimetic principle of *translatio studii*. He makes his philosophical points about difference, authority, and the ideal self by modeling his argument on Plato's *Sophist*. More specifically, Kierkegaard *re-appropriates* the contemporary discussion of the difference between genius and talent⁹ by *imitating* Plato's manner of unmasking the Sophist as an imposter of the true philosopher, while *furnishing it with a new problem* of the difference between a genius and an apostle. At stake is the representational dimension of Kierkegaard's presentation of the ideal self. The presentation is not value-neutral, because it is paired with his criticism of the role and status of originality and genius among his contemporaries. Kierkegaard achieves this goal on several levels. While they overlap significantly, I will identify three parallels between the thinkers, which will draw out Kierkegaard's mimetic engagement with Plato.

First, the argument for the uniqueness of an apostle's authority in "The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle" mirrors Plato's argument for the superiority of the philosopher over the sophist. In particular, H.H.'s claim of the apostle's divine authority, which contrasts with the genius's authority that stems from her extraordinary endowments and capacities, resonates with Plato's approval of the philosopher's concern for the divine over the sophist's preoccupation with the talent and craftsmanship of maintaining transient and illusory appearances and semblances. The analytical focus of the essay is the Apostle Paul. This New Testament figure is juxtaposed with the epitome of genius: Shakespeare.¹⁰ In such a comparison, Paul initially severely loses out against Shakespeare. He

does not have the talent that marks this genius of theater. H.H. explains with irony:

as an author of beautiful metaphors, [Paul] ranks rather low; as a stylist, he is a totally unknown name—and as a tapestry maker, well, I must say that I do not know how high he can rank in this regard.

(WA: 94/SKS 11: 98)

The apostle is no match for Shakespeare.

Like the true philosopher from Plato's dialogues, the Apostle does not concentrate on his skills, whatever they are, but rather appeals to the "divine and spiritual sign" (*Apology*, 31d). The Apostle Paul does not care about "beautiful metaphors ... [or] 'Whether the image is beautiful or threadbare and obsolete,'" as this is what concerns someone with merely human endowments (WA: 96/SKS 11: 100; *Sophist*, 236a). Fixated on appearances is the sophist who attributes a divine status to his skills, but he is just the maker of semblances. Additionally, the Apostle takes responsibility for producing the right representations of his divine authority. This is contrary to the sophist, who is not accountable for the appearances that he makes of himself.

At the same time, Paul should not be perceived as an ordinary person ("no immanence of eternity places him essentially on the same line with all human beings"), because he "has something paradoxically new to bring" (WA: 94/SKS 11: 98; bold font in original). Hence, the difference between a genius and an apostle is qualitative—the former belongs to immanence, the latter to transcendence. Furthermore, a genius is born with authority and has it in himself; and yet this authority is of human origin, contrary to the divine authority of an apostle that is given to her. Applying a slightly Hegelian twist to the concept of genius, H.H. notices that a genius *qua* genius is *kata dynamin*, which means that he is one in his potentiality, and that quality may take time to fully develop. Furthermore, a genius may be born ahead of her time, such that a certain paradoxicality often accompanies her growth. Nonetheless, this quality eventually "vanishes" and in some cases "the human race ... assimilates the one-time paradoxical in such a way that it is no longer paradoxical" (WA: 95/SKS 11:99).

Second, Kierkegaard exposes the Romantic idea of genius in a similar manner to Plato's unmasking of the sophist; just as the Romantic genius only appears to be a true extraordinary for Kierkegaard, so the sophist is only an imposter of the true philosopher for Plato. This second thread connecting Kierkegaard and Plato is visible in the Dane's appropriation of the moral evaluation of the sophists in Plato's dialogue. More specifically, there is a moral foundation to what Kierkegaard diagnoses as a common disregard for the qualitative difference between a genius and an apostle. Kierkegaard believes that what he ironically calls "erroneous

exegesis,” “pastoral ignorance,” and the “good-natured and well-meaning thoughtlessness” of collapsing the apostle into the genius actually results from the human sinful condition that cherishes deceit and “thoughtless eloquence” (WA: 93/SKS 11: 97). Moreover, these features are the results of doubt and lack of faith of Christian leaders, who are “ashamed of obeying, submitting to authority” (WA: 104/SKS 11: 107). While Kierkegaard suggests the unconscious and affective dimension of this disease of disbelief, he suspects Christian leaders of being aware of their lack of faith in the authority of God. Their insincerity is largely operative on the cognitive register. They are imposters of faith, “smuggling God away” from Christianity.

Correspondingly, Plato attributes similar features of character to the sophist, both directly and indirectly. Plato indicates that the sophist is aware of the fact that he is an imposter. As a mere imitator of a philosopher, the sophist is “suspicious and fearful that he doesn’t know the things that he pretends in front of others to know,” as the Visitor elucidates (*Sophist*, 268a). Negative moral appraisal of the sophist continues as he is an “insincere imitator” who is prone to deliberately mislead his hearers and take money for his teaching, even though he teaches untruth. The Visitor, in his philosophical method of discernment, or as he calls it, “cleansing,” invites the reader to make an evaluative judgment (*Sophist*, 226d–e). Reading such a presentation of the sophist, we suspect him of taking advantage of his students and (naturally) attribute to him bad will, a lack of credibility, and compromised personal integrity.

Third, Kierkegaard’s presentation of an apostle resembles Plato’s presentation of the true philosopher in that both thinkers present their figures in comparison with critically appraised characters. Plato’s presentation of the genuine self is framed by his evaluation of the nature of sophistry. That is to say, his debunking of the sophist is not an end in itself; it serves as a background for the inauguration of the true philosopher. This act of exposing the sophist as an imposter appeals to our common sense and our faculty of judgment. Given that we would *naturally* follow, hence imitate, that which is morally good and honest, we *naturally* want to steer clear of sophists. In his dialogue, Plato employs a philosophical and literary device of comparison built upon the relation between identity and difference, which itself is also a form of discernment. The sophist is like the philosopher (for instance, both meet their interlocutors in private), but is also different from him (the sophist claims things he cannot articulate truthfully, while the philosopher openly claims that he does not have any truth apart from the truthfulness of that claim). By emphasizing the difference, Plato cultivates in the audience of his dialogues, whom he treats as pursuers of truth, an inner attitude that praises the Visitor and condemns the sophist. Through the figure of the philosopher, Plato constructs and subsequently implements a model of the ideal self and thus implicitly convinces the audience of the truthfulness of his thesis.

Criticizing theologians and dogmaticians, to whom both of H.H.'s *Two Ethical-Religious Essays* are dedicated, Kierkegaard presents himself as an authority "without authority." His authority is not in the genial quality of his literary productions, but in his correct reading of the requirement of Christian existence that demands obedience to God. This demand is radical, as the first essay of H.H. claims. The true Christian is a martyr. So is Kierkegaard's ideal self. In contrast to the theologians and dogmaticians who attract their followers by affective sermons (WA: 104–105/SKS 11: 107), the martyr's "death for the sake of the truth will stand as an awakening example [*Forbilledede for følgende*] for later generations" (WA: 72/SKS 11:77). Like the martyr, but also like Socrates from Plato's *Apology*, the apostle "has no other evidence than his own statement, and at most his willingness to suffer everything joyfully for the sake of that statement" (WA: 105/SKS 11: 108).

1.2.3 *Creativity, Autonomy, Selfhood*

Kierkegaard's reflections on genius are not unequivocally negative or condemnatory. He is not critical of genius *per se*. In fact, he presents himself as a genius who is capable of understanding the nuances of Christian existence. Kierkegaard's genial capacity resides in his extraordinary dialectical skills that permit him to adequately represent the requirements of Christian existence in modernity. In a sense he is a religious, or to be more specific, a Christian genius. This Christian quality turns the genius into an utterly paradoxical figure, because genius is an aesthetic-immanent category. Kierkegaard defines the genius in his journals as "the primitive, the original, the seminal point of departure within the sphere of immanence" (JP 2: 1293/Pap. VII.2 B 261). As he notes elsewhere, while genius has the capacity to bring something new to the world, this capacity is "only a primitivity of reproduction" (BA: 86/SKS 15: 212); that is, it does not bring anything that is not already in potentiality in the immanent world.

In this account of the genius, Kierkegaard seems to side with Hegel, at least partially, against the Romantics and one of his contemporaries, the defrocked pastor Adolf Adler. While his reason for targeting the Romantics is to demystify what the French anthropologist René Girard calls "the romantic lie," Kierkegaard criticizes Adler for marrying Romanticism and Christianity. More specifically, he denounces Adler's paradoxical hybrid of a genius-apostle. Kierkegaard makes his respective arguments by reconstructing and emphasizing the mimetic dimension of human nature and by demonstrating the logical difficulties behind Adler's Romantic-Christian idea of the genius-apostle. While critical of Adler's aberration that marries the apostolic category of divinity with the human ideal of genial creativity, Kierkegaard reassures himself of being a Christian genius; Kierkegaard is a Christian genius because he rejects the claim to apostolic authority.

In *Between Irony and Witness*, Joel Rasmussen (2006) rightfully points out that the Romantics were critical of mimesis understood as imitation. They cherished the ideal of mimesis understood as originality and criticized forms of art that aim to represent reality and hence were related to a pre-given existing model. The Romantics maintained that the true imitator does not appeal to any particular model, but rather creates out of herself, not representing but constructing a “new world” and “new subject” (Rasmussen 2006: 123). Rasmussen indicates that Kierkegaard offers a critical correction to the Romantic mode of “living poetically” by transforming it into “existing before God” and creating within God’s creation (2006: 109).

However, what seems to be less of a focus among Kierkegaard scholars here is that such mimesis in Kierkegaard is a hybrid kind *à la* Hegel’s imitation-creativity. More specifically, in his own conceptualization of mimesis, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, on the one hand, Kierkegaard follows the Romantics in valuing originality over realistic representation of a model. On the other hand, contra the Romantics, Kierkegaard maintains that the Christian existential creation is in fact in relation to a model, a seemingly Hegelian point. Yet, in contrast to Hegel, the model is transcendent. The model is also a paradoxical one. It is the Christian God. In that sense, while building upon Hegel’s dialectical imitation-creativity mimesis, Kierkegaard’s mimesis undeniably breaks away from Hegel’s “internalized imitation.” Kierkegaard achieves this by indicating that the model is transcendent in relation to Hegel’s System.

Kierkegaard’s criticism of the Romantic genius is simultaneously a criticism of Romantic anthropology, especially with regard to autonomy and agency. In “Does a Human Being...,” H.H. indicates that genius is characterized by two important qualities, internal teleology and resistance to human imitation; he calls them “humanity” and “pride,” respectively. “The humanity consists in his not defining himself teleologically in relation to any other person” (WA: 107/SKS 11: 110). The genius’s pride is his disregard for the opinions of others. Despite this anti-mimetic composure of a genius, the genius is nonetheless in some sense related to other people, which H.H. harshly dubs the crowd, the masses, or the public. He notices that both the genius and the apostle are “offensive in our day, when the crowd, the masses, the public, and other such abstractions seek to turn everything upside down” (WA: 107/SKS 11: 110). This offensiveness of both the genius and the apostle is caused by the paradoxicality of their natures. Yet, the paradoxicality of genius is only historical; it does not count in the bigger picture. The extraordinariness of genius is judged severely by H.H. It is “the unity of being a useless superfluity and a costly ornament,” a dichotomy that has a relative-historical validity to the crowd and that will eventually be understood and worked out by humanity (WA: 107/SKS 11: 111). This is to say that what comes across today as extraordinary will not so much amaze people in the

future. Criticizing Adler in the posthumously published *Book on Adler*, Kierkegaard explains: “It is true that a genius can be an offense, esthetically, for a moment or fifty years, or hundred, but he can never be an offense ethically” (BA: 33/Pap. VIII-2 B I5 66). The paradoxical property of a human being is doomed to be eventually appropriated by society at some point in time. In relation to eternity, the genius that composes their own self and their own new world creates castles in the sky that have no ultimate validity. From the perspective of divine authority, these constructs are mere fantasy, “something vanishing.” The true paradoxicality is in divine authority that is a timeless offense to people.

While I will elaborate the mimetic dimension of crowd behavior in Kierkegaard in Chapter 6, for our current purposes it is important to briefly explain the mimetic dynamics of crowd-genius suggested by the thinker. Kierkegaard indicates that, at first glance, a crowd is what it is by virtue of its own inner complex dynamics of interdependence. The crowd changes under the stress of various ideological, social, or political influences. In contrast, a genius is what one is by birth, and their identity and greatness do not come from others—they lie in them. Ultimately Kierkegaard challenges that view, demonstrating that no human being is (absolutely) immune from the influence of others. In fact, the crowd and the genius are inter-reliant.

This illusion of autonomy Girard calls “the romantic lie.” In his *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, of which the more telling original French title is *Mensonge Romantique et Vérité Romanesque*, he argues that modern literature discloses the truth of the essentially mimetic structure of the self. All humans are essentially interdependent. Preceding Girard, Kierkegaard detects an interdependence of extraordinary figures in society and crowds (publics and masses). While for the Romantics, the self of a genius can claim fundamental creative autonomy, Kierkegaard and Girard demonstrate that the Romantic self is not ultimately self-governing—hence the “romantic lie”—and, as classical examples of modern prose reveal, the Romantic self is determined by other people—hence “the literary truth” (O’Shea 2010: 58). For Girard, a genius is what he terms the “interdividual,” an individual who participates in an ongoing process of mutual constitution based on the idea of reflexive mimeticism (Cowdell 2010: 78).

Such a view is to an extent confirmed by H.H. in his first essay. The crowd is defined as collectively imitating itself. Its teleology is one of absolute and abstract unity. Paradoxically, on the one hand, the crowd creates extraordinary figures; the crowd is without quality and needs an object of admiration that has an amalgamating effect on the crowd. On the other hand, the genius’s desire to distance himself from the crowd entices the members of the crowd to persecute him. What the crowd desires is a complete identity, and by imitating the desires of others, the crowd becomes unanimous in creating, persecuting, and sacrificing the extraordinary figure as the scapegoat.

Furthermore, while Christ and the apostle both provoke the crowd to persecute them and put them to death, just as the genius entices “the power-craving crowd” to violence, the latter has all the rights to resist, ignore, or escape it. By contrast, Christ and the apostle could do no such thing; as H.H. indicates, the apostle “exists entirely for the sake of others” (WA: 107/SKS 11:110). While a genius is exempted from the crowd, paradoxically, the genius’s conspicuous master is its double, namely the crowd. The apostle’s validity is qualified by eternity, and God is their master.

Lastly, what both Kierkegaard and Girard observe in relation to the dynamics between the extraordinary individual and the crowd is that they both desire power. If the apostle “had power in the worldly sense, had great influence and powerful connections, by which forces one is victorious over people’s opinions and judgments” and used it, “he would define his endeavor in essential identity with the endeavor of other people” (WA: 105/SKS 11: 109). This fragment shows that the extraordinary means of influence that is often attributed to genius in fact represents something that all people truly desire: influence and meaning (WA: 106/SKS 11: 110).¹¹ Although a genius is different from the crowd, she desires what others desire; in Girardian terms, a genius desires power.

Furthermore, on the one hand, the crowd desires genius for its own sake and thus, in a certain sense, elevates one of its members (the genius) into the position of a mediator of its desire. On the other hand, the genius becomes the crowd’s imitative double, entering into a vicious relation between desire and violence. The genius often becomes the crowd’s scapegoat.

In this opening chapter, I have demonstrated that Kierkegaard was an active participant in the important scholarly discussions of mimesis among his early and late contemporaries. He had a good knowledge of the classical models of mimesis and of the main themes of the mimetic discourse of his time. I have shown that Kierkegaard contributed a unique understanding of modern aesthetics by criticizing the representational limitations of art. Moreover, I have presented Kierkegaard as arguing for a less naïve account of human creativity and autonomy through his criticism of the notions of genius and originality. Reading Kierkegaard alongside Plato, I have indicated that mimesis in Kierkegaard is not just about concepts and ideas; it is also about the “how” of the presentation of his ideas in his writings that is not value-neutral or unintentional; rather, it is inseparable from the communicated content. Yet, Kierkegaard does not achieve these goals without encountering problems, such as the aesthetic-religious puzzle of the representation of the suffering of the crucified Christ. Additionally, his criticism of genius seems radical and problematic when compared, for instance, with how he attributes the concept of genius to himself.

As I have argued so far, and as will be made clearer in the chapters to follow, Kierkegaard’s appraisal of mimesis is deeply dialectical. While not

committing himself to one specific rendering of mimesis, Kierkegaard is not a syncretic thinker *à la* Hegel; in relation to mimesis, Kierkegaard is neither a classical nor a full-fledged modern thinker.

Notes

- 1 In all quotations throughout this book, all italicized text appears as italicized in the original sources of the quotations, unless stated otherwise.
- 2 Two forms of mystery or *mysterium*, *mysterium fascinans* and *mysterium tremendum*, constitute Rudolf Otto's concept of religious experience, so-called "numinous experience." *Mysterium fascinans*, as the name suggests, causes in the subject fascination with the object and captures the subject's attention by its unique attractiveness. The *fascinans* joins the *tremendum*, which can be experienced in pleasure, in excitement, or in horror. It is an exceptional phenomenon to be found in the whole history of religion: see Otto (1992: 77–85).
- 3 For the sake of space, I will briefly point to those aspects of the debate that are directly relevant to this investigation, without attempting to provide a comprehensive account. For the latter, see Gebauer and Wulf (1995: 107–119). See also Kierkegaard's skillful reformulation of the battle in his *The Battle between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars* (included in EPW).
- 4 For a comprehensive account of genius in Kant's third critique, but also for a broader comprehensive account of the subject of genius as such, see Bruno (2010), esp. the chapter "Origins of Genius," 9–57.
- 5 "That genius 1) is a talent for producing that for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition of skill for that which can be learned in accordance with some rule, consequently that originality must be its primary characteristic" (Kant 2000: 186).
- 6 The discussion of genius in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous "Letter to the Reader" mostly addresses the ideas discussed in "all the German books." See for example the footnote in SLW: 483/SKS 6: 445: "An immediate genius can become a poet, artist, mathematician, etc., but a thinking person must, after all, know his relationship to the human existence lest he, despite all the German books, become a monstrosity (with the help of the pure being, which is an unthing)."
- 7 "The product we postulate is none other than the product of genius, or, since genius is possible only in the arts, the product of art" (Schelling 1997: 222). See also Guyer (2014: 82).
- 8 "Genius is thus marked off from everything that consists in mere talent or skill by the fact that through it a contradiction is resolved, which is soluble absolutely and otherwise by nothing else" (Schelling 1997: 228). See also Burwick (2001: 83).
- 9 For an overview of the discussion, see Virtanen (1981: 69–90).
- 10 Plato is also considered a genius in the passage. To avoid confusion, I am not mentioning him here.
- 11 On the relationship between genius and power, see Bruno (2010: esp. 9–57 and 99–141).

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2 Repetition, Recollection, Time, Meaning

“Repetition” and “recollection” are among those words from Kierkegaard’s vocabulary that, snatched from their ordinary environments of everyday use, the author infuses with new meanings that are often complex, if not ambiguous. While using the words in a straightforward sense, at times Kierkegaard does not shy away from either pluralistic or equivocal engagements of “repetition” and “recollection” in his authorship. The uneven cycle of Kierkegaard’s usage of “repetition” accelerates with the eponymous *Repetition* published pseudonymously in October 1843. It slows down considerably with the publication of *A Literary Review of Two Ages* in March 1946. “Recollection” appears more often in Kierkegaard’s works. It is used by the majority of Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms. It appears in religious, ethical, and aesthetic contexts. It is defined in relation to other concepts such as memory or reflection, but Kierkegaard also uses it to define such concepts as identity and habit. Moreover, recollection is rendered and valued in relation to its object; for instance, recollection of the aesthetic, or *aesthetic recollection*, is largely criticized by Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms against recollection that is *ethical*.

A comprehensive exposition and systematization of both concepts is clearly beyond the scope of this chapter. Here I focus on how Kierkegaard’s usages of repetition and recollection can be better understood when analyzed in relation to mimesis. I also zoom in on various tropes and intuitions about mimesis that can be extracted from repetition and recollection in his works. As the primary sources for my investigation, I take *Repetition*, *A Literary Review*, and *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*. While Kierkegaardian scholarship does not suffer from a lack of a critical reflection on most of these works, the consideration of the mimetic dimension of repetition and recollection is rarely part of the scholarly focus.¹ My role in this chapter is to address this gap. I am then specifically paying attention to Kierkegaard’s explicit and implicit insights about the mimetic dimension of repetition and recollection in the considered works.

The overall argument in this chapter is that Kierkegaard uses the category of repetition to think critically and constructively about the

temporal and *repeatable* dimensions of human existence. More specifically, Kierkegaard zeros in on the breadth of human life that is time-oriented and concrete, but also mundane, ordinary, and recurrent. Doing so, he grapples with the meaning behind the human experience of living a life that is structured *by, in, and around* time, while also lived in the world of similarities, copies, and reiterations.

Kierkegaard works counter to the philosophical trend of his times. Instead of pursuing the ideals of the novel and original, his works attempt to rethink the value of the everyday human experience of living in the world. This orientation is central to his engagement with repetition and recollection. He does not relinquish the sphere of human ideality but takes it as essentially in tension with the real, reiterated and temporally embedded. Kierkegaard's categories of repetition and recollection allow for a meaningful inhabitation of the world that is intelligible to us through likenesses, similarities, and recurrences. They also expose us to that which is beyond the known and anticipated. While Kierkegaard's engagement with repetition is in many ways part of his larger agenda of the rehabilitation of *copy* against *original*, I show that his treatment of repetition and recollection in *Repetition, A Literary Review*, and *The Crisis* points toward a reading of mimesis as embodied and performative. I also argue that Kierkegaard uses repetition in his search for the meaning of life in an individual existence that is essentially affected by mimesis.

This chapter has two main sections. In Section 2.1, I focus on *Repetition* to explicate Kierkegaard's usage of the categories of repetition and recollection as they qualify three elements of human life: movement, imagination, and time. On the conceptual level, radically contrasting repetition and recollection in *Repetition*, Kierkegaard spells out the religious breadth of repetition and presents recollection as a failed repetition.

In Section 2.2, I analyze *A Literary Review* and *The Crisis* to portray how Kierkegaard engages repetition and recollection to conceptualize such categories of existence as time, life-view, and performance. Both works disclose a more nuanced view of the relation between repetition and recollection. The former is focused on the ethical stage of life and sets repetition and recollection in a dialectic relation of interdependency. *The Crisis*, concerned with the aesthetic ideal of representation, considerably reevaluates recollection against its reading in *Repetition* and argues for its primacy in the earnest art of acting.

2.1 Movement, Imagination, Time

2.1.1 Repetition's *Repetitions*

The link between repetition and mimesis escapes the majority of Kierkegaard scholars reflecting on *Repetition*.² This is despite the intuitive and widely recognizable mimetic quality of repetition that refers

to an act of *redoing* something or *representing* it in a similar or different medium or fashion. In fact, Kierkegaard's *Repetition* is replete with various meanings and instances of repetition. Already, the very title of the book puzzles us by suggesting that such an ordinary word can be a source of a meaningful philosophical insight. *Repetition's* subtitle, "A Venture in Experimenting Psychology," suggests the mimetic quality of repetition as well. It is in the nature of an experiment—and experimenting—that it is repeated and that its results can be reproduced, and we can identify overlaps and similarities between these results. In experiments, we also attempt to look at one thing from various perspectives; hence, the repetitive nature of experimentation necessitates variation. What is important in Kierkegaard's *experimenting* is that, understood existentially, the procedure never yields indistinguishable results; *true* repetition is non-identical.

The name of the pseudonymous author—itsself already a peculiar instance of repetition—suggests a type of repetition that is important for our understanding of time. Constantin Constantius's name refers to continuity, while the recurrence of the first name within the last name suggests an inner pairing and division implied in repetition. In this way, the implied repetition of continuity motivates us to think about how we recognize continuity in time, and also to rethink what exactly continuity in time is. *Repetition* starts with a "report" that itself, as an account of something that happened in the past, is a repetition and reformulation of the event. Moreover, *Repetition* contains several instances of "repetitions" from Kierkegaard's life. Some autobiographical remarks smuggled into the book include variations on Kierkegaard's repeated trips to Berlin and a romantic affair with his fiancée Regine.

Lastly, the book is rife with textual repetitions. For instance, the second paragraph in the book opens with "Recollection's love is the only happy love, an author has said"; this phrase is almost literally repeated in the next paragraph: "Recollection's love is the only happy love, says an author" (R: 131, 133/SKS 4: 9, 11).³ Another example of such mimetic textual interplay in *Repetition* is "Farce is performed at the Königstädter Theater, and quite naturally a varied audience goes there"; and "Farce is performed at the Königstädter Theater, and ... in my opinion superbly" (R: 158, 161/SKS 4: 34, 36).⁴

Kierkegaard's deliberate and multilayered strategy of infusing *Repetition* with various meanings of repetition exposes us to the richness and complexity behind possible philosophical readings of this word. It also sets the mood for an attentive search for particular conceptualizations of that word's importance for his philosophy. I am focusing on three main framings of repetition as a mimetic concept, qualifying three interconnected elements of human existence in the work by Constantin Constantius, namely movement, imagination, and time. Crucial for this investigation is Kierkegaard's radical and value-laden

juxtaposition of repetition and recollection, where the latter is presented as an unsuccessful repetition in *Repetition*.

2.1.2 *Movement and Love*

Kierkegaard engages repetition to challenge our usual way of thinking about the relationships between movement, imagination, and time. The opening of the first part of the book, called “Report by Constantin Constantius,” introduces the reader to an anecdote about a classical discussion among Greek thinkers concerning the possibility of movement. In this passage, two ways of thinking are being contrasted. First, we have presented the type of thinking expressed by a typical armchair philosopher who disregards human experience of living in the world. In contrast to that philosophical attitude to movement, we see a way of thinking that treats data collected from experience as the main source of philosophy.

The first type of thinking is exemplified by the Eleatics. They “denied motion” based on an argument of the supposedly contradictory nature of the concept of change, while drawing on their skepticism toward the reliability of experience. The Eleatics are contrasted to Diogenes of Sinope who “literally did come forward, because he did not say a word but merely paced back and forth a few times, thereby assuming that he had sufficiently refuted them” (R: 131/SKS 4: 9). These two ways of thinking about reality, rooted in the classical tradition of philosophy, have not lost their influence in Kierkegaard’s times. On the one hand, one could draw a parallel between the Eleatic philosophers and the epistemological-metaphysical foundations of German Idealism, especially in the Romantic tradition, that is based on abstract operations of the mind. On the other hand, the philosophical commitments of the likes of Diogenes of Sinope correspond to the attitude toward the world represented by British Empiricists and contemporary natural scientists.

This deliberation over movement is *repeated* in the life of Constantin Constantius, this time in relation to a new category of repetition. On the one hand, just as the Eleatics were engaged in abstract deliberations about the possibility of movement, Constantin Constantius admits to being “occupied for some time ... with the question of repetition—whether or not it is possible, what importance it has, whether something gains or loses in being repeated” (R: 131/SKS 4: 9). His deliberation over the question of repetition eventually “immobilizes” Constantin Constantius. On the other hand, just like Diogenes, who made a move that was supposed to prove the possibility of movement by “pacing back and forth a few times,” Constantin Constantius *repeats* his trip to Berlin to get a conclusive answer on the matter of repetition.

By indicating that Diogenes only “assumed” that his action successfully addressed the skepticism of the Eleatics and that his own repeated trip to Berlin turned out to be inconclusive, Kierkegaard urges us to see that

these two ways of thinking about reality should not be kept apart in radical opposition. They should, in a sense, come together to account for a meaningful way of thinking about human existence in the world. In this rhetorical and philosophical move, Kierkegaard distances himself from Hegel's method of sublation used to "resolve" contrasting ideas or approaches to philosophical problems (Stewart 2010: 87–89). On the other hand, instead of thinking of a grand project of metaphysics that combines aspects of two opposing approaches to reality *à la* Kant, Kierkegaard proposes what he calls a "psychological experimenting" that takes as its subject an individual lived experience. With this novel and challenging philosophical approach to movement in mind, Constantin Constantius invites us, the readers, to follow his venture, but also to grapple together with "the question of repetition." As he prophetically pronounces, this question "will play a very important role in modern philosophy" (R: 131/SKS 4: 9).

The author makes several important claims about repetition. First is that to understand repetition, we need to have a good grasp of its relative concept of recollection. Repetition is both similar to and yet different from recollection. Repetition and recollection represent the same movement but in opposite directions. He says: "[W]hat is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward" (R: 131/SKS 4: 9). Following from this one, his second remark suggests that while recollection is oriented toward knowledge, repetition is oriented toward life. Lastly, the author notices that when it comes to the human life, if one dedicates one's efforts to recollection, one will only be unhappy; this is in the contrast to repetition that "makes a person happy" (R: 131/SKS 4: 9). As a case study that proves his point, Constantin Constantius introduces love. He states that recollection leads to unhappy love, while in contrast, repetition leads to happy love.

Here is Constantin Constantius's reasoning: recollection and unhappy love are based on hope directed toward love; they signify a hope *for* love, a hope *to be* loved. Such an agonizing expectation, which Constantin Constantius calls "the restlessness of hope," is destructive. The argument is that if I am in a romantic relationship with someone, I should not hope that this relation will one day turn into a love relationship. I should not expect that one day love will come, that someone will love me, and that whatever is between me and that other person will turn into love. This hope will make me unhappy, miserable, depressed—it will wear me down. Furthermore, Constantin Constantius worries that if love "arrives" into the relationship, then not knowing what love truly is, I cannot be sure that it will meet my expectations. Such a hope, says Constantin Constantius, is "a new garment ... but it has never been tried on, and therefore one does not know how becoming it will be or how it will fit" (R: 132/SKS 4: 10).

The author takes a similar trajectory when considering the limitations of recollection. True love does not have "the sadness of recollection"

of “an old woman turning the spinning wheel of recollection;” she is focused on that which has been, but will never come back (R: 132/SKS 4: 10). Such recollection makes us despair because, on the one hand, it takes us back to those days when in excited anticipation we awaited the new, the intoxicating, the titillating, the butterflies. On the other hand, as recollection is linked to memory, it will constantly remind us of the torment and agony of uncertainty that *was* part of the whole business of anticipation.

For Constantin Constantius, repetition signifies happy love. Provided one is in love truly, one does not hope for what one already has. One does not need to wait for a *better love*, because if that were the case, it would be doubtful that one was actually in love. Moreover, one should not engage in recollective returns to the good old days stored in memory. One should rather act on love repeating what one already is in *possession*. Indeed, true love requires those acts of continuous repetition. Hence, love never simply *is*; even if we *have it*, it must be constantly repeated, hence actualized in time. Constantin Constantius’s argument is that the nature of love is precisely in its continuous acts of repetition. Like many other elements of human life, love must be experienced and expressed in the here and now. This does not suggest that we should merely *act on love* in a fleeting moment. On the contrary, we need to continuously bring it back into existence. To be what it truly is, love must be repeated.

Repetition in love is not simply repetition of the same. In her memoir *The Argonauts*, Maggie Nelson skillfully captures the repeated qualification of love. After declaring her love, in anguish of rejection, Nelson addresses her lover with a fragment from *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* about the mythical Argonauts constantly renewing their ship during their voyage. Nelson’s appraisal of the repetitive dimension of her pronouncement of love to her lover gains new meaning every time, never at the expense of previous ones uttered (Nelson 2015: 4–5). Despite Barthes’s probable mistake of confusing the story with the famous ship of Theseus, at stake for him is the active dimension of the confession of love. Pronouncing their love, the lover does not mean the same each time; and each time the lover does not mean something completely different. Barthes says,

So I decide that the amorous apostrophe, though I repeat and rehearse it day by day through the course of time, will somehow recover, each time I utter it, a new state. Like the Argonaut renewing his ship during its voyage without changing its name, the subject in love will perform a long task through the course of one and the same exclamation, gradually dialecticizing the original demand though without ever dimming the incandescence of its initial address, considering that the very task of love and of language is to give to one and the same phrase inflections which will be forever new.

(Barthes 1977: 114)

This act of bringing love into existence *requires* imagination for Kierkegaard. It is also *aided* by imagination. This is where movement and imagination are intertwined in Kierkegaard. While his account of imagination in *Repetition* is neither succinct nor systematic, Constantin Constantius alludes to several understandings of the concept. In one sense, imagination is a human capacity to think and engage with various possibilities. We ask someone to consider and evaluate a problem or a scenario, because we are interested in what they have imagined, what they think about it, or whether they would agree or disagree with it. In a different sense, imagination is used to consider complex scenarios that are structured around their own particular rules. This sense of imagination is retained in the English translation of the Danish *experimenterende* from the subtitle of *Repetition*, into “imaginary construction” by the Hongs. This capacity for imagination distinguishes Kierkegaard’s poet from other people. Just as the scientist formulates hypotheses that are then tested in experiments, so the poet constructs imaginatively a number of problems set in specific scenarios that are eventually tested using operations of the mind.

As a special human capacity, imagination is understood here to be related to movement, time, and memory, but also repetition and recollection. Recollection is focused on things that happened and are in the past, and when pondered will stay in the past; or, as captured in the mind, they will be held in a timeless realm of imagination and will never be actualized. In contrast, repetition is oriented toward the future, which, although initially grasped in imagination, ultimately becomes translated into actual existence. It becomes real.

In that sense of repetition, we can do two things in and through repetition. On the one hand, we can transcend the now and venture into the future. An object of our reflection grasped in imagination can be related into the present and, in consequence, it can determine our actions now and in the future. To illustrate that, my desire to be a teacher, for instance, will be realized if I can successfully visualize myself as a teacher in the act of imagination. If I want to be a teacher, I should first envisage myself in a particular image in imagination. Then, I need to order my life accordingly so I can realize that “potentiality” represented in an image. This means that some parts of my life will be dedicated to attending university, doing required readings and writing, and other necessary elements related to my future job.

On the other hand, in one peculiar sense, repetition is about “bringing” the past into the future. We can come back to an event in the past in a reflective recollection and then import that thing from the past to our current lives in such a way that the thing from the past becomes an element of our present and future at the same time. An example of that would be knowledge. What I have learned in the past is in my mind and I remember it. I can use that knowledge in various new situations where it

is applicable. Memory is not just about information, but acts as well, and I do not need to relearn every skill each time I need to act.

2.1.3 *Existence, Imagination, Time*

By contextualizing repetition in relation to movement, time, and memory, Constantin Constantius uses this concept to formulate a desired conception of existence. Repetition qualifies existence as authentic and wholesome, for Constantin Constantius, because it escapes the two extremes of the ideality of life: absolute self-identity and total difference. He says:

Who could want to be a tablet on which time writes something new every instant or to be a memorial volume of the past? Who could want to be susceptible to every fleeting thing, the novel, which always enervatingly diverts the soul anew? If God himself had not willed repetition, the world would not have come into existence. Either he would have followed the superficial plans of hope or he would have retracted everything and preserved it in recollection. This he did not do. Therefore, the world continues, and it continues because it is a repetition. Repetition—that is actuality and earnestness of existence.

(R: 132–133/SKS 4: 10–11)

The crux of the matter when it comes to Constantin Constantius's account of genuine existence in this passage lies in the realization that the ideality of human life is stretched between “a tablet on which time writes something new every instant” and “a memorial volume of the past.” The former presents a vision of life that is composed of pure events where every moment is absolutely discrete. The latter is a criticism of a view of unchanging perfection grasped in re-creating memory.

In this passage, Kierkegaard suggests that human life is stretched between the same and the new—both, taken individually, represent undesired extremes. If life were to solely consist of *the novel*, we would not recognize ourselves as ourselves; if it were to consist of *the same*—“the memorial volume of the past”—we would not be able to meaningfully live in the world in time. Moreover, repetition qualifies ontology—the world “continues because it is a repetition”; it is God herself that “repeats it” in a process of constant creation that is in time. Lastly, we need repetition to inhabit the world. We do so by recognizing similar spaces, people, foods, and landmarks. Otherwise, the world as a stream of unrepeatable *novelties*, random non-similarities, pure events, would not be recognizable to us, and we would never be able to feel at home in the world.

Speaking of repetition's *ability* to inhabit the world, the author warns us about the dangers of imagination. While criticizing the ideal of unmediated, spontaneous, unreflective life of limited agency, he also points to its very opposite—a hyper-reflective existence fueled by and lived in

imagination. Such a life consists of planning, conjecturing, and speculation that will never be realized. It revolves around continual ruminations about some cherished moments from the past. This type of existence is expressed in the life of the young man who falls in love with a girl, but avoids acting in relation to the object of his love. The young woman he is in love with, Constantin Constantius adds, “had made him a poet—and precisely thereby had signed her own death sentence” (R: 138/SKS 4: 15). Her death sentence refers to fact that she will never be to the young man who she truly is as an evolving, multifaceted human being. This is so because, as a poet, the young man will memorialize her in the act of peculiar and reductionist timeless idealization. “The memory of her was forever alive” (R: 138/SKS 4: 15). *Forever* alive, but never *truly* alive, one could add, as the author says: “In a sense, her existence or non-existence was virtually meaningless to him” (R: 138/SKS 4: 15). The young man’s approach to his loved one de-individualizes her and de-substantializes her; he is not interested in exploring who she really is, but rather imagines her to be someone she is not. The young man is in danger of “go[ing] astray in the interesting,” which in this context means his investment in the ideal of the beloved, not in her true self (R: 147/SKS 4: 23–24). “[T]he interesting can never be repeated;” hence the “girl who does not wish for the interesting believes in repetition” (R: 147–148/SKS 4: 24).

The problematic dimension of imagination in *Repetition* is also invoked in relation to the ideal of a unified vision of life, which the author calls personality. Personality, the subject of Kierkegaard’s preoccupations running throughout his authorship from his early writings, is linked with human selfhood that is understood as a task. An individual must consciously and continuously produce personality. Important for that production is the power of one’s capacity of imagination. In that regard, this process of developing personality requires two movements. For Constantin Constantius, to have one’s personality awaken, one must transcend one’s facticity in an imaginative act that produces a number of imaginary self-representations that, when abstracted, can be scrutinized and evaluated. The succeeding movement requires that the individual *returns* to himself and implements these constructed potentialities in his concrete life. Kierkegaard’s pseudonym, Vigilius Haufniensis, reiterates the urgency of this task in his *The Concept of Anxiety*, wondering: “Here the question about repetition reappears: to what extent can an individuality, after having begun religious reflection, succeed in returning to himself again, whole in every respect?” (CA: 106/SKS 4: 408).

While Kierkegaard sees several dangers in relation to this process, in *Repetition* he focuses on what he denounces on the part of an individual as a lack of commitment to one’s life possibilities, and the perilous infinitizing capacity of imagination. Speaking of a natural and inevitable stage of human development, Constantin Constantius points to an aspect of life when individuals produce and entertain a number of self-representations,

which he calls “possible variations” (R: 154/SKS 4: 30). This is the case in the life of every individual who has a capacity for imagination. He describes this process thus:

There is probably no young person with any imagination who has not at some time been enthralled [*fængslet*—means prison] by the magic of the theater and wished to be swept along into that artificial actuality in order like a double [*or som en Dobbeltgænger at see og høre sig selv*] to see and hear himself and to split himself up into every possible variation of himself, and nevertheless in such a way that every variation is still himself.

In such a self-vision of the imagination, the individual is not an actual shape but a shadow, or, more correctly, the actual shape is invisibly present and therefore is not satisfied to cast one shadow, but the individual has a variety of shadows, all of which resemble him and which momentarily have equal status as being himself.

(R: 154/SKS 4: 30)

Picturing this formative process of a human psyche, Constantin Constantius uses the example of a “magic theater” in which individuals are being captured, probably to some extent against their will, as the Danish *fængslet*, meaning prison, suggests. By being “swept along” or *torn into* this artificial realm of the theater, one is able to “see and hear” oneself in one’s doppelganger [*Dobbeltgænger*]. This mimetic mirroring of the theater constitutes a type of a private laboratory where one can fragment oneself into “every possible variation” of oneself. By wishing that every heterogeneous possibility of himself be him, the young man from Constantin Constantius’s example cannot commit to one particular *version* of himself. The young man is unable to move into one particular direction; he cannot take “shape,” but is only a shadow, or a phantom. Every possibility of his existence has the same right to be him, and yet they are so different from each other. These factors contribute to an absolute fragmentation of his identity.

This lack of commitment and fragmentation of identity prevent the character from “gaining” personality, which precisely requires committing to one particular “self-vision of the imagination.” Without the effort to “satisfy” the demands of that one particular imagistic vision of oneself, which the author understands as the movement of translating the imaginatively constructed possibility of existence into concrete life, the young man opts out from time-oriented and ethically laden existence. Constantin Constantius states, “it is tragic or comic if the individual makes the mistake of living out his life in ... shadow-existence” (R: 145–155/SKS 4: 30). Such existence is marked by a lack of commitment to the realization of future plans; it is filled with a “deputation of good intentions, twenty-four-hour resolutions, half-hour plans” and “the individual’s possibility [that] wanders about in

its own possibility, discovering now one possibility, now another” (R: 155/SKS 4: 30). In that timeless realm which “shadow-existence” inhabits, an individual immerses themselves in the whirlwind of unrealized, and to some extent unrealizable, potentialities of existence. These potentialities are not idle themselves. As we learn from Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness unto Death*, the potentialities have the capacity to spawn multitudes of new potentialities, leading to the infinitizing abstraction of the individual and fragmentation of life (Kaftanski 2021).

Constantin Constantius finds the solution to this conundrum in the individual’s decision to take ownership over their possibilities. Building on the idea of the internal theater, the author suggests that the individual at stake must strive to recognize oneself in one specific *version* of their possibility. Suggesting that these imagined possibilities have both audible and visual dimensions, Kierkegaard appeals to the individual’s reason, but he also indicates the affective power of these synergistic representations. More specifically, on the one hand, to distinguish himself from “the frothing foam of words that sound without resonance ... from the shadows,” the individual must identify his own voice with the voice of the most shaped possibility that already has a form (R: 156/SKS 4: 31). On the other hand, that individual must “recognize himself in this [concrete] reflected image” of himself (R: 156/SKS 4: 31). Such concrete possibility Constantin Constantius calls “a robber captain.” It represents a somehow concretized and shaped possibility of “masculine form, his quick and yet penetrating glance, the autograph of passion in the lines of his face” (R: 156/SKS 4: 31).

Mimesis is strongly accentuated here. We have an insistence on an affective and intellectual engagement of an individual with the audible and the visual of (self) representation. Also emphasized here are the notions of recognition, association, identification, and, last but not least, the theatrical. This staging of mimesis prepares the role of repetition as mitigating the danger of the infinitizing capacity of imagination, and as structuring human existence in time. Understood as a “category of performativity,” which aims to activate the subjectivity of the reader, repetition is introduced here negatively, by an account of failed repetition.⁵ This ambivalence of repetition, which Kierkegaard introduces to puzzle us, is his strategy to force us to make sense of the text that is itself posited as a conundrum. We see that strategy operative in Kierkegaard’s presentation of Constantin Constantius as, on the one hand, someone who introduces and teaches the readers about true repetition, and, on the other hand, as someone who misunderstands and fails engendering repetition. Put differently, Constantin Constantius knows what repetition is, or is supposed to be, but he cannot experience it; he cannot *repeat*. We see failed repetitions in his several accounts of his (in)experiences with repetitions. More specifically, Constantin Constantius tests the possibility of repetition in theater, on a rural voyage, and returning home.

The theater episode portrays Constantin Constantius's *awakening* at Königstädter Theater. Although in a blissful mood, while feeling that he “lack[s] something,” he sees a woman who “cheer[s]” him. He is captivated not by what unfolds on the stage, but by a young spectator who is composed, just like “a robber captain,” but she is also modestly dressed, authentic, and content. She is happy and “enjoy[s] herself thoroughly” (R: 167/SKS 4: 41). Being already trained in voyeuristic excursions to the rural parts of Copenhagen where he seasoned himself in observing from distance a “Happy girl!” whom he most likely met “six years ago,” Constantin Constantius plans on effecting that repetition at Königstädter Theater. And he fails. He repeats repetition in every possible way and, failing to undertake a genuine repetition, is left in a state where his “desolation had reached its extremity, [his] principles had collapsed” (R: 171/SKS 4: 45).

The life of Constantin Constantius is torn between two ambiguities. On the one hand, just as his name testifies, Constantin Constantius does not like ruptures and radical changes. He likes constancy and monotony, as he says:

I could be fairly certain of finding everything in my home prepared for repetition. I have always strongly mistrusted all upheavals, yes, to the extent that for this reason I even hate any sort of housecleaning, especially floor scrubbing with soap. I had left the strictest instructions that my conservative principles should be maintained also in my absence.

(R: 171/SKS 4: 45)

Or, as he reiterates this point speaking about the repetition-oriented economy of his life in the following part of the book called “Repetition”:

A monotonous and unvarying order was established in my whole economy ... Everything unable to move stood in its appointed place, and everything that moved went its calculated course: my clock, my servant, and I, myself, who with measured pace walked up and down the floor.

(R: 179/SKS 4: 50)

This life of Constantin Constantius has been captured and preserved in *timelessness* just like the people of Pompeii whose lives were preserved by the ashes of the erupted Mount Vesuvius. As I have already indicated, such constancy does not allow one to properly experience time, which is known to us through motion and change—true aspects of repetition.

On the other hand, the author is *aware* that change qualifies life as meaningful. Yet, his *lived conception* of change is based on constancy; paradoxically, Constantin Constantius expects change that is *the same*.

Changes that are radically similar are not changes at all. His dogmatic attitude is what makes Constantin Constantius desensitized toward life (“anesthetic”), “forgetting the world” (R: 179/SKS 4: 50). Although he physically ages, his life is not lived in time that is marked by commitment to difference, the unknown, and uncontrollable. Constantin Constantius is unable to reach the ideal of a unified and meaningful life. He is perpetually torn between the genuine theory of life, which seeks and espouses rupture and difference, and the immobilizing life practice of absolute constancy, which seeks safety in absolute sameness. This is, paradoxically, in contrast to the life of the young man, who, as we read, got stuck in a love affair, something he never expected to do and something that initially costs him “honor and pride and along with it the vitality and meaning of life” (R: 199/SKS 4: 67). He says: “I am at the end of my rope. I am nauseated by life; it is insipid—without salt and meaning” (R: 200/SKS 4: 68).

As we learn from Constantin Constantius, the young man decides to embrace the unknown of the love affair “by virtue of the absurd.” The absurd, being the impenetrable and the unexplainable, represents the real movement that the young man is commencing by taking the occasion of the loved girl very seriously—hence, by venturing beyond the comfort zone of the known. In this, he resembles Job, who, in earnestness, accepts the disturbing and disorientating loss and horror of “all existence collaps[ing] upon” him. Like Job, who does not do away with the absurd by either explaining it away in theoretical discourse, or by finding himself guilty against his friends, the young man decides to “subordinate” himself to the “[un]anticipated” of the girl’s love (R: 201–202/SKS 4: 69). Not without strife, though. In his letters to Constantin Constantius, the young man hints both at “go[ing] mad” and “undergo[ing] a change,” and “becom[ing] another person” (R: 201/SKS 4: 69). He says: “Who is to blame but her and the third factor, from whence no one knows, which moved me with its stimulus and transformed me?” (R: 202/SKS 4: 70). Through this act, the young man differentiates himself from Constantin Constantius, who takes every irregularity or rupture only as an intriguing subject of his passionless and objective observations.

Although Kierkegaard is an advocate of the ideal of a unified life, the contrast between Constantin Constantius and the young man teaches us something crucial about the meaning of life. It is not based on a form of identity that is built around an absolute self-identification or self-recognition, without difference, rupture, and temporality in life. While suspended in Kierkegaard’s authorship for some time, this theme reappears in *A Literary Review*, to which we will turn next.

2.2 Time, Life-View, Metamorphosis

Kierkegaard continues his exposition of the subjects of repetition and recollection, as well as time, a unified meaningful life, and transformation

in his signed *A Literary Review* and his pseudonymously published *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*. His treatment of repetition and recollection in *A Literary Review* changes the dynamics between the concepts. While arguing uncompromisingly for a particular religious account of life in *Repetition*, Kierkegaard rehabilitates the ethical sphere of life in *A Literary Review*. Therein, he presents repetition and recollection as dialectically interrelated. In *The Crisis* he moves even further away from the ideal of religious life sketched in *Repetition*. He reevaluates the aesthetic life-view denounced in *Repetition* and *A Literary Review*, and introduces recollection as an essential category for a meaningful life.

2.2.1 Two Ages, Life-View, the Ethical

Simply titled *A Literary Review*, Kierkegaard's praise of *Two Ages* published pseudonymously by Thomasine Gyllembourg-Ehrensvärd reckons with the subjects of meaning in and authenticity of life, which Kierkegaard identifies as key elements of "a life-view." In contrast to *Repetition*, which contemplates human existence in relation to time that is ahead of us, *A Literary Review* takes time as the starting point for thinking about human existence in hindsight. Furthermore, while the young man from *Repetition* has all the time ahead of himself, the author of the review of *Two Ages* looks at his life in retrospect, attempting to recognize what is to be learned from life lived in and through time. The book adds to the equation a sociohistorical-political factor shaping the understanding of the human experience of existence in time, which he calls "the age" or "the times."

Pondering how our lived context affects us, Kierkegaard asks in *A Literary Review* whether how we live our lives and what we value can be both relevant to our historical context and be representative of the existential ideal of being faithful to oneself. His consideration of time is dialectical. On the one hand, Kierkegaard is critical of understanding time "in its abstract meaning" that renders it as "an extremely indifferent power" (TA: 10/SKS 8: 14). In that sense, it is naïve to say that time does not affect us and does not influence our thinking about ourselves. On the other hand, taking issue with Hegel, Kierkegaard criticizes the view that a changing sociopolitical context presupposes an alteration in our values and modes of existence. Kierkegaard claims that one can indeed be both faithful to oneself and not oblivious to the changing of the historical situation. An example that demonstrates a successful meeting of this demand is to be found in the authorship of the anonymous author of *Two Ages*. Commending the author, Kierkegaard indicates that his review

is a choice occasion for a happy repetition of a beautiful recollection. The author [of *Two Ages*], after all, has remained the same, "one in

all”; the reading world does not need to be instructed, does not even need to be reminded, but may still be happy to be reminded of what it knew.

(TA: 12/SKS 8: 15)

Does Kierkegaard contradict himself here, speaking of a repetition of a recollection? Are not these notions supposed to be in conflict with each other? It does not seem to be the case here. In fact, Kierkegaard has three things in mind while speaking of a repetition of a recollection. First, as we learn from the book, the author of *Two Ages* is able to “remain the same” in the sense of being true to herself, while witnessing the two ages in which she has lived. Remaining the same is achieved by repeating oneself across time, by what Kierkegaard sees as approaching the new with the same set of values, convictions, and passions—that is, the same “life-view” or “world-view” (TA: 14/SKS 8: 17–18). Second, the ideal of remaining the same is neither original nor novel, but rather *something* “the reading world” has been aware of, and which the world needs to recollect. Put differently, the reading world needs not to learn the new, but to recollect the same, or as Kierkegaard puts it: “the reading world ... may still be happy to be reminded of what it knew.” Third, if Gyllembourg-Ehrensward is successful with a genuine recollection, which Kierkegaard indeed confirms in his review, then we are presented with a positive model of a meaningful existence. Gyllembourg-Ehrensward “can be a guide,” or, as he puts it differently, reading her work we “are under the protection of a guiding star” (TA: 16/SKS 8: 19). Gyllembourg-Ehrensward’s effective reiteration of a genuine “life-view” across her production allows for one to be “changed in the repetition.” This change is, as Kierkegaard appends, one “that is not by way of masquerade costumes an occasion for others to grasp curiously at something new but is an occasion for inwardness” (TA: 16/SKS 8: 19).

The danger lurking behind the repetition of recollection is that it can be misunderstood as, or reduced to, a recollection of a repetition symptomatic of Constantine Constantius’s failed repetition. As an example of a successful attempt at genuine repetition, Kierkegaard presents himself as a reviewer of the book. While his review of the book serves as a form of a recollection of what Gyllembourg-Ehrensward argues therein, he as an author portrays himself as “changed in the repetition” (TA: 23/SKS 8: 26). The dialectic of repetition implied here is that Kierkegaard’s steadfast and consistent recognition of the value of the production of Gyllembourg-Ehrensward, in which he as a reviewer is “unchanged,” conditions him to be “changed in repetition.” On the other hand, Kierkegaard is being reminded of that which he knows, which is the superiority of the individual over the crowd that he finds in one’s commitment to an idea around which an authentic human existence can be developed (TA: 112/SKS 8: 106).

What makes Gyllembourg-Ehrens-värd's life stand out in respect to the demands of the changing sociohistorical context of her day is readily seen in a paradigmatic consistency of her literary production. By attributing to her the possession of a world-view, Kierkegaard recognizes that Gyllembourg-Ehrens-värd is able to resist the mimetic, fashion-fueled intellectual demand to focus on the novel and intriguing. Although Kierkegaard remarks that she manages to sustain a happy and "compatible" relation to her readership, he focuses on her as "*The author [who] has been faithful to [her]self*" (TA: 13/SKS 8: 17). More than a feature of a character, but rather a normative qualification of existence, her unswerving life-view permeates her production that spans a period of over 20 years.

Gyllembourg-Ehrens-värd is neither oblivious nor immune to the vicissitudes of life. In fact, her stories reflect how she experiences social transformations symptomatic of the eponymous two ages. She accounts for the moments of pain and suffering and those of elation and joy. The life-view of Gyllembourg-Ehrens-värd can be identified through an empathetic immersion in many of her works, of which the most widely read was her early novella *A Story of Everyday Life*. The title of this work effectively functions as her pseudonym (as she frequently subtitles her subsequent production "A Story from the Author of *A Story of the Everyday Life*") and becomes the leitmotif of her work overall (Nun 2009: 154).

The relation between everyday and profound aspects of human existence catches the attention of Kierkegaard. He believes that both the repetitive run-of-the-mill and the more distinguished and subtle dimensions of human life are meaningful. A life-view is achieved precisely through an earnest, reflective, and active incorporation of both dimensions of human life into a unified and teleological life-project. Availing oneself of such a conception of life, an individual can meet the often unexpected and challenging demands of the real world. The life-view, as Sylvia Walsh explicates, constitutes in Kierkegaard that which "provides a comprehensive center of orientation that enables one to take a firm, positive stance toward life, with a sense of self-confidence in meeting the challenges of life rather than being overcome by them" (1994: 37).

Commenting on Kierkegaard's take on the idea of a life-view in the work of Gyllembourg-Ehrens-värd, Marcia Robinson states that the author "has lived the perspective that she illustrates in her novels [and] she knows what she wants to say about life" (2009: 296). Such a conception of life Robinson attributes to Gyllembourg-Ehrens-värd against Kierkegaard's critical evaluation of Hans Christian Andersen's *Only a Fiddler*. Andersen's work is "without a life-view and the lived experience that gives rise to a life-view ... [and he] cannot give a story the meaning, unity, and integrity that would make it beautiful, uplifting—good" (Robinson 2009: 296). As Kierkegaard puts it in his *From the Papers of*

One Still Living, “Admittedly, here [in *Only a Fiddler*] we do not encounter a world-view tried out in so very many lives, nor the life-gymnastic so characteristic of the aforementioned short novels” (EPW: 69/SKS 1: 24). Established firmly on “the life-gymnastic,” which is how Kierkegaard refers to lived experiences, a life-view formulated in Gyllembourg-Ehrensward’s novels integrates the fluctuations and unexpected changes in life; as such, the “life-view [remains] the same” (TA: 13–14/SKS 8:17).

It is important to emphasize that this sameness of the life-view is not akin to the “memorial volume of the past” criticized in *Repetition*; rather, it is analogous to God’s sustained, unceasing creation of the world expressed in His willed repetition, praised in the same book (R: 133/SKS 4: 10–11; see also TA: 14/SKS 8: 17). Life-view is not oriented toward the ideal of objective stability; it is dynamic and accommodating of change.⁶ Kierkegaard confirms this stipulation in *Two Ages*, where he lays out his appraisal of the role of repetition, sameness, difference, creativity, and mimesis in relation to a life-view, thus:

The life-view that creatively sustains [*der skaberisk bærer*] these stories remains the same, while an ingenious inventiveness and an acquired resource of rich experience and a vegetative luxuriance of prolific mood serve to produce change within the creative repetition.

This author, however, has an intrinsic faithfulness and reproduces his own originality in the repetition.

(TA: 13–14/SKS 8: 17)

A close analysis of this passage discloses a nuanced relation between repetition and difference that can be rendered as stretched across three axes. This rendering, on the one hand, further elucidates the mimetic dimension of repetition in *A Literary Review*. On the other hand, it coheres with my analysis of the concept of repetition in *Repetition*. It also fleshes out an important understanding of the category of difference that is fundamental to Kierkegaard’s overall production. Difference is used here implicitly. It regulates the conceptual tension between the old and the new embedded in *repetition with a difference* as presented across three axes.

The first axis is to be found in Kierkegaard’s reference to the life-view that “creatively sustains” and “remains the same.” On the one end of the axis, we have what the Hongs rendered as creative sustaining, translating *creatively* the Danish “*der skaberisk bærer*,” which literally means creative bearing, or creative carrying. On its other end, the axis points to a uniformity of the life-view that “remains the same.” This peculiar sameness of the life-view is upheld by its being regularly employed in various other novels authored by Gyllembourg-Ehrensward. *The new of creativity* and *the old of the same* are necessary and sufficient to account for the “author’s continued creating,” which, although not absolutely different (instantaneous or randomized), is also not an instance of mere

copying. Her substantial literary production premised on a unified vision of life is grounded in repetition that harnesses both the new and the old. Hence, it is neither simply creativity without identity, nor identity without difference.

The second axis further elaborates the dialectical dimension of the “author’s continued creating” by contrasting the “acquired resource of rich experience” with the “ingenious inventiveness” and “a vegetative luxuriance of prolific mood.” The acquired experience represents *the new* of learned knowledge and skills; the latter two suggest inborn, yet to some extent moldable, human capacities and dispositions. Kierkegaard presents them as being interrelated. Dialectically combined, *the new* and *the old* “produce change within the creative repetition,” which is emblematic of “the life-view [that] is the same” (TA: 14/SKS 8: 17).

The third axis contrasts two renderings of mimesis present in the passage. On the one hand, we have mimesis understood as the accurate imitation of a model. We find it in the author’s dedication to offer a faithful representation of her life-view in her authorship, but also in the number of invocations of the quality of sameness of various elements of the life-view:

The disquietude is essentially the same, the quietude is essentially the same, the movement in all the stories is essentially from the same to the same; the discord introduced has essentially the same resilience, the peacefulness and relaxation are also the same—that is, the life-view is the same.

(TA: 14/SKS 8: 17)

On the other hand, mimesis is understood as creatively differing from the model. This differing points toward the category of difference that essentially qualifies mimesis as *repetition with a difference*. This repetition is originality-retaining; it is not repetition of an absolute difference. We see this in Kierkegaard’s insistence that repetition is not of the same, because, on the one hand, we would not be able to tell the difference between the model and its representation. On the other hand, the absolutely different would be unintelligible to us. The consequences of that, according to Catherine Pickstock, would be “tragic and cosmic.” Without the interplay of repetition and identity, Pickstock adds, “We lose the foothold of familiarity; we wander about and forget why we are here. At the most extreme, this leads us to a loss of sense of self or self-identification” (2013: 1).

Repetition with a difference (not of a difference, as Deleuze (1994) would assume—such would yield a complete nonidentity in the world and the lack of an actual subject) discloses to us the presumed life-view of the author. The author’s life cannot be reduced to her production, as it precedes her authorship (“Because [she] is not a self-seeking author

but one who found [herself] before [she] became an author"; TA: 16/SKS 8: 19). Yet, the production is not absolutely divorced from her life-view. They are interrelated in repetition with a difference that gradually "produces" excess that influences, if not constitutes, both her actual life and her literary production. We see this production of excess in Kierkegaard's reference to "a vegetative luxuriance of prolific mood [*en frugtbar Stemnings vegetative Frodighed*]" attributed to the author of *Two Ages*. The organic abundance of (over)production of the subject's self "brings forth as its fruit a work of interiority" into the exteriority of authorship (TA: 15/SKS 8: 17).

We should keep in mind that the intended genuine *repetition with a difference* symptomatic of a unified vision of life discernible in Gyllembourg-Ehrensward's authorship is ultimately related to a presumed corresponding unified vision of life practice. Indeed, as Vigilius Haufniensis points out in *The Concept of Anxiety*, "repetition is the watchword in every ethical (life)-view [*Anskuelse*]" (CA: 18/SKS 4: 324). The ethical dimension of a life-view should not be understated here. In that respect, a life-view provides an individual with a unified, hence non-fragmented vision of life, and of life's teleology, meaning, and purpose. Furthermore, a life-view grounds an individual in the actual, in contrast to the religious and the aesthetic that alienate them from the real world. "The aesthetic does this ... by way of making imagination dominant over reality; the doing [of the religious leads to] a similar upending of reality's dominance within the individual's life-view," as Joseph Westfall (2009: 196) interprets the conundrum.

This reading of a life-view as essentially ethical does not contradict Kierkegaard's earlier remarks about a possibility of an aesthetic life-view from "The Balance between Esthetic and Ethical" in *Either/Or* 2. Therein, Kierkegaard ultimately points to the limitations, if not the failure, of an aesthetic life-view. An aesthetic "life-view is despair itself" (EO2: 194/SKS 3: 187). It is so as the aesthete as "a hater of activity in life" cannot secure "meaning in life [that] must have continuity" (EO2: 195/SKS 3: 189). Although at first glance, an aesthetic life-view may come across as unified, as it revolves around a unifying desire, in fact "desire per se is a multiplicity, and thus it is easy to see that this life splits up into a boundless multiplicity [held] within the sphere of reflection," hence the realm of inactivity (EO2: 183/SKS 3: 178). What the aesthete might be in possession of is "a system," which, devoid of the ethical component, is not a life-view (EO2: 321/SKS 3: 303).

Lastly, an important light on the relation between originality, repetition, sameness, and difference is shed by Vigilius Haufniensis in his discussion of earnestness and disposition. He defines earnestness as the highest and deepest form of disposition. Disposition is principally habitual. It is produced and ingrained in us over time and is operative largely in an unconscious manner; it is also activated bypassing reflection, hence,

Vigilius Haufniensis calls it “a determinant of immediacy” (CA: 148–149/SKS 4: 448).

Yet, paired with reflection, “the acquired originality of disposition” is able to mitigate the largely unreflective and habitual dimensions of disposition. Yet, this “mitigation” does not mean removing from the equation the recurring elements of human life—the mundane, the repeated, the already known. To the contrary, the reproduction of one’s originality signifies “returning” to the same with invigorated attitude of the first, “original” love. Illustrating that thought with an example of a priest who every Sunday repeats the same activities (“Every Sunday, a clergyman must recite the prescribed common prayer, and every Sunday he baptizes several children”; CA: 149/SKS 4: 449), Vigilius Haufniensis argues that the priest, in earnestness, does every Sunday at the same time something identical and something different. The priest engages in *repetition with a difference* by virtue of approaching his “recurring” duties with the attitude of earnestness. Every time he “recite[s] the prescribed common prayer,” he performs something he is well familiar with, but he also does something *new*.

2.2.2 The Crisis, *Performance, the Aesthetic*

Originally published in 1848 as a series of articles under Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Inter et Inter, *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* carries on with the subjects of the meaning of life and faithfulness to oneself, change, continuity, and time, but also with recollection. There are numerous thematic parallels between *A Literary Review* and *The Crisis*. For instance, examining the work of Gyllembourg-Ehrensward, Kierkegaard is attentive to the 20-year span of her literary production; analogously, *The Crisis* examines the 14 years (or so) of the artistic life of a Danish actress, Johanne Luise Heiberg. Yet, while the subject of Kierkegaard’s praise in the work of Gyllembourg-Ehrensward is her sharp reflection on the grand sociohistorical shifts in family life, *The Crisis* takes as its study a case from “the world of theater.” Additionally, whereas *A Literary Review* zooms in on the discrete interrelationship of Gyllembourg-Ehrensward’s life and her literary production that reveals her moral integrity demonstrated over time, *The Crisis* evaluates the way Heiberg faces the influence on her life of the passage of time and the inherently “cyclical” and predictable nature of her line of work.

Exploring *The Crisis*, I argue that Kierkegaard motivates us to learn from the “little article” how to orient ourselves in an environment that is shaped by forces that, while independent from us, are often foreseeable. Moreover, I read *The Crisis* as Kierkegaard’s criticism of habit, which represents a failed strategy for retrieving meaning from the repetitive and temporal dimensions of human existence. Whether we will succeed in living authentic lives depends upon our understanding of and continuous

mindful and non-habitual re-commitment to “most truly serv[ing] the truth” (CD: 315/SKS 14: 101), and to acting “in the service of an idea” (CD: 321/SKS 14: 105).

The Crisis has not attracted much attention from Kierkegaard scholars. Its perplexing authorship and unanticipated content “secured” the text a peripheral position in Kierkegaard research. Indeed, the subject of *The Crisis* does not seem to fit with Kierkegaard’s authorial impetus at the time, which was focused on religious themes. Furthermore, the text does not offer the readers a great deal of detail regarding its author, Inter et Inter; hence, it makes it even more difficult to enter the text along an authorial-hermeneutic key so important to understanding Kierkegaard’s production. Some attempts have been made to decipher the enigmatic authorial voice of this pseudonym of Kierkegaard. Samuel McCormick traces Inter et Inter to the Latin proverb *Distingueundum est inter et inter*, which means “It is necessary to distinguish between notions that need to be distinguished.” After locating some instances of Kierkegaard’s deployments of the phrase *inter et inter* in *Either/Or*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, and *Postscript*, McCormick concludes that Kierkegaard used it to distinguish himself from his old adversary Johan Ludvig Heiberg and his wife—the actress Johanne Luise Heiberg, whom Kierkegaard greatly revered (2012: 4). Westfall, after providing a more comprehensive overview of scholarly interpretations of the pseudonym, reckons that Kierkegaard’s scarce presentation of Inter et Inter in the work suggests that the pseudonym must be solely understood through the content of the work, which is about determining what it means to be a good theater critic (2015: 107–109).

What has been overlooked regarding Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous author is the fact that his name (as one would assume the author being a male) contains in itself a repetition of “Inter.” This inevitably reminds us of the pseudonymous author of *Repetition*, Constantin Constantius. While Constantin Constantius’s name suggests continuity, Inter et Inter’s name translates into “(in) between and (in) between” and indicates rupture and modification. Such an appraisal of Inter et Inter resonates with the repeated “crisis” in the title of the work, *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, which suggests a tipping point or an interruption. Unsurprisingly, the word “crisis” does not appear in the essay either.

Nevertheless, Kierkegaard engages “crisis” copiously in another of his works, “Guilty?”/“Not Guilty?” written under an enigmatic pseudonym, Frater Taciturnus. The word “crisis” appears in the work in relation to such familiar themes as time, interruption, continuity, and habit. Its protagonist, Quidam, paints crisis in pejorative colors, presenting it as essentially generated by the feeling of fragmentation in his life. Crisis comes “suddenly.” In that sense, lurking below the surface of a unified wholesome life, “the most terrible crisis” forces its way through fissures of discontinuity caused by momentary spates of disunity and disarray in

human life. Quidam confesses that he cannot feel at ease without conceiving of his existence as a coherent narrative that provides a consistent framework for his present functioning. As it is impossible to live in constant rumination about one's existence as set against some background life story (unless in timeless imagination abstracted from the real), Quidam must endlessly revisit "the history of [his] sufferings so that [he] can immediately orient [him]self in the whole" (SLW: 313/SKS 6: 291).

Another type of crisis occurs between various instantiations of Quidam's "revisiting" of his life-story, meaning his various "returns" to the holistic picture of his life. His anxious, relentless recourse to a ready-to-use instant narrative account unifying his life, which he calls "a short summary of the history of my sufferings," is unreflective and habitual; in that he resembles "a sick person habituated to a certain medicine [who] must take the painkilling drops along with him wherever he goes" (SLW: 313/SKS 6: 290). If Quidam forgets to recollect his story of suffering after "an interval of half a day ... the most terrible crisis occurs" (SLW: 313/SKS 6: 291). To mitigate that, Quidam chooses habit as a mechanism for coping with the anxiety of losing a foothold in reality.

The crisis Kierkegaard has in mind in the story of Quidam, but also in his account of the artistic life of Heiberg in *The Crisis*, denotes those moments in our life when we are confronted with situations that produce in us ambivalent reactions to life's vicissitudes. As I have argued elsewhere, Quidam is faced with the task of reconciling his passion for his lover and his commitments to a higher view of religious life that is incompatible with the relationship (Kaftanski and Rossatti 2015: 69). The conflict of values and passions in the fictitious life of Quidam can be resolved by the authorial manipulations of the writer, Frater Taciturnus, e.g. through textual editing.

This, however, is different from a real life of the actress who has to negotiate her values and talents with the often unflattering circumstances inherent to her line of work. While Kierkegaard does not want us to draw overpromising conclusions about a robust vision of a unified life from his review of the achievements of Heiberg, his goal is to demonstrate that one's commitment to the aesthetic ideal requires an attitude of sobriety toward the predictable, tedious, and transient dimensions of life. This attitude necessitates repetitive efforts to continually, and with earnestness, re-dedicate oneself to the idea; its antipode is blind mechanical habit. This is something that is expected from Quidam, who "does not retrieve himself in joy quickly enough to repeat the movement again" (SLW: 472/SKS 6: 435).

In *The Crisis*, Inter et Inter describes the life of an eminent actress as having a predetermined cycle. He indicates that the cycle of her artistic activity does not depend on her. Rather, it is the consumers of the theater who determine the cycle of her career-span. A typical career of an actress starts when her talent is discovered when she is still a teenager. This is caused by the fact that female actors are stereotypically sought after to

represent on stage the ideal of youthfulness. Unsurprisingly, the cycle ends when the actress ages and, as it is assumed, as a mature woman she is unable to represent youthfulness. Caught between both poles of the cycle, she is left to her own devices to retain the audience's admiration. This, as the author notices, is not always something she can control. She must often agree to terms and means of maintaining admiration that go against her own preferences. Admiration is also a form of violence that is unleashed on the actress by her admirers.

The pressure of expectations mounted on the actress from the outside is augmented by the pressure rising from the inside. By this *Inter et Inter* understands the actress's numerous challenges with finding the internal motivation and strength to continue in the acting business as "she goes on living year after year" (CD: 303/SKS 14: 93). Even while her particular performances are hailed as phenomenal and exquisite masterpieces, the life of an actress is to a large degree foreseeable and repetitive. It is marked by a routine of rehearsals and predetermined repertoire. At the beginning of his piece, *Inter et Inter* depicts the severity of the actress's routine life thus:

The admired artist goes on living year after year. Just as in middle-class households one knows exactly in advance what will be served for dinner each day, so also does she know exactly the season's perquisites in advance.

(CD: 303/SKS 14: 93)

The reaction of the public to an eminent theater actress is also so ominously predictable and, in a sense, repetitive. While admired, the actress will be literally imitated in physical objects ("her portrait will be painted for every art exhibition; she will be lithographed and, if fortune favors her very much, her portrait will even be printed on handkerchiefs and hat crowns" (CD: 304/SKS 14: 93). The imitation is also metaphorical. The actress will be represented in conversations ("an object of everyone's admiring discussions, also of those who are dying to have something to chatter about") (CD: 304/SKS 14: 93). These metaphorical and literal extensions of the actress beyond her actual performances is not to her credit. Rather, the truth of the matter is somehow the opposite.

Inter et Inter's observation here is that the emotion of admiration is problematic in many ways. Although I will discuss admiration at length in Chapter 6, I will here mention two aspects of admiration that are important for the scope of this chapter. First, admiration as an emotion has its own cycle and, as often determined by changing social tastes, is not a reliable way of measuring value. The argument is that the actress is at the mercy of the uncultivated consumers of the theater, who with their "cannibalistic taste for human sacrifices" can easily swing from appreciation of the idolized actress to the urge to get rid of her. Knowing

the cycle of admiration, Inter et Inter is aware that idolizing admiration eventually leads to its opposite of displeasure and anger. In that sense, Kierkegaard sees the actress as an eminent figure who incites “the power-craving crowd” to violence, just as the genius and the apostle do.

Second, while not necessarily produced by habit, admiration is often artificially prolonged by it. Pointing that out, Inter et Inter argues for the dialectical dimension of the influence of time on admiration and the negative consequences of the marriage of admiration with habit. On the one hand, true admiration does not have merely an instantaneous reactive dimension; it truly reveals itself over time. On the other hand, time may contribute to admiration becoming just a matter of a habit by stamping out the original value or excellence that is detected by the rise of this emotion in us. We as humans have a tendency to “indulge in the fraud of habit” that has an insidious power of changing the meaningful into the meaningless (CD: 315/SKS 14: 101). Being aware of this aspect of habit and our inclination to engage with it, Inter et Inter emphasizes the necessity of our conscious, continual, and non-habitual recommitment to our ideals. Our recommitment to the ideals sustains our “inner being” by allowing us to reflectively return to and hold on to values and ideals that shape our identity. In contrast, deeply habitual existence, while at face value suggesting steadfastness and unity of the subject, in fact changes it by slowly undermining the individual’s commitment to values that are essentially reflective of the individual’s “inner being.”

The actress is not absolutely defenseless against the habitual and temporal dimensions of admiration because she understands well her predicament. One way to mitigate parts of the dangers that lay ahead is in what Inter et Inter dubs “metamorphosis” (CD: 305–306/SKS 14: 94–95). This is a strategy the actress can adopt to protect herself against the violence of the public. The strategy, easily recognizable to “the cultured esthetician,” is about preservation, cultivation, and performance of “the inner being beautifully and with intense meaning” (CD: 305–306/SKS 14: 94–95). While the author offers neither a systematic nor succinct account of metamorphosis, he describes it in relation to time. Metamorphosis is recognizable only through time-oriented performance of the actress, who by performing learns what it means to be an actress in the eminent sense. Moreover, this metamorphosis is a movement of bringing to the present that which has its roots in the past, which in the case of the actress is her youthfulness, and recommitment to the ideal of youthfulness. Heiberg is able to attain this in her mature performance of the role of Juliet, which she initially performed 19 years earlier. Moreover, she achieves this by earnestly “relati[ng] to the same idea of femininity *sensu eminentissimo* ... over the years” (CD: 324/SKS 14: 107).

Although the idea is understood aesthetically, the author does not mean the aesthetic in a pejorative sense of existence that has failed to live up

to its requirements. Rather, he refers to the positive ideal of youthfulness contrasted with the youthfulness that Inter et Inter calls “undialectical” or “simple youthfulness” that is destroyed by time (CD: 319/SKS 14: 104). This actress’s movement from the past to the present is accomplished by recollection that has an ideal dimension. Inter et Inter explains:

Time has asserted its rights; there is something that has become a thing of the past. But then in turn an ideality of recollection will vividly illuminate the whole performance, an incarnation that was not present even in those days of the first youthfulness. Only in recollection is there complete tranquility, and therefore the calm fire of the eternal, its imperishable glow. She has been calmed in the eternity of her essential genius; she will not childishly or plaintively long for the blazing of what has vanished, because in the metamorphosis itself she has become too warm and too rich for that. This pure, calmed, and rejuvenating recollecting, like an idealizing light, will transilluminate the whole performance, which in this illumination will be completely transparent.

(CD: 323/SKS 14: 106)

What seems puzzling here is that, through the voice of Inter et Inter, Kierkegaard gives a positive account of recollection in the case of Heiberg’s acting career. We would expect here repetition, rather than recollection. Yet, the subject of the articles is precisely an aesthetic critique in an eminent sense. Just as *A Literary Review* is not a book that seeks religious tropes (because a life-view is not fundamentally a religious ideal), so *The Crisis* seeks as its audience a “cultured” or “essential” aesthetician. “Rejuvenating recollecting” brings out what has been essentially in the actress during her first performance of Juliet to what Inter et Inter calls “the second stage” of the actress’ development (CD: 306/SKS 14: 95). Inter et Inter understands “the first fieriness of an essential genius” or “robust originality” that are present in the actress at the beginning as essential to her being a truly exceptional artist (CD: 309/SKS 14: 97). In that second stage, thanks to the metamorphosis, the actress is able to recollect and present youthfulness on the stage of the theater. This performative recollection of youthfulness brings back and expresses “the same originality that she preserves” with the intention to represent the ideal (CD: 318/SKS 14: 103). It is also a manifestation of her deliberate performative re-commitment to the ideal.

While Inter et Inter speaks of the metamorphosis of return to youthfulness, it is not the only type of metamorphosis that the actress can experience. Indeed, he distinguishes two different metamorphoses: aesthetic and ethical. The former type of metamorphosis he calls the metamorphosis of potentiation [*Den Metamorphose ... er Potensationens*]. This type of metamorphosis—a crucial subject of *The Crisis*—allows the actress

to gain authentic admiration from the aesthete. This is so primarily because her performance is the external that communicates the internal of the time-oriented intensification of her relation to the timeless ideal of youthfulness. Lastly, the metamorphosis is aesthetic exactly because the actress's relation to the ideal is "purely esthetic." By that *Inter et Inter* asserts that the actress can dialectically distinguish the ideal of youthfulness from the contingent aspect of her actual age, while still being only a teen. While she may be able to grasp the validity of such a distinction from the age of 17, the actual aesthetic metamorphosis needs time as a distancing factor. This shows that metamorphosis is dialectical and has two elements: "foresight" and "recollecting hindsight" (CD: 319/SKS 14: 104).

The ethical metamorphosis is structured around time understood as "a process, a succession, a steady transformation over the years," hence its name: metamorphosis of continuity (CD: 323–324/SKS 14: 106–107). It does not focus on an essential representation of a particular ideal, akin to the metamorphosis of potentiation. Rather, it is concerned with an artistic maturation of an actress, through taking roles suitable to her age and standing. Put another way, while in the metamorphosis of potentiation, the actress dedicates her career to representing one particular ideal of youthfulness; in the ethical metamorphosis of continuity, she can represent a range of female-type roles, such as of a lover, mother, widow, etc. Although Kierkegaard does not elaborate the ethical metamorphosis in detail, he links it with perfectionism and, what he calls, changing spheres. *Inter et Inter* ultimately finishes his piece by indicating the rarity of both metamorphoses and suggests their compatibility and interrelation.

In this chapter, I brought to light the mimetic dimension of repetition and recollection in Kierkegaard. I demonstrated that Kierkegaard engages both terms in relation to mimesis to direct philosophical attention to the human experience of temporality. In that respect, he offers a vision of a meaningful life that makes sense of the everyday and often repetitive constituents of human experience of inhabiting the world. Zooming in on *Repetition, A Literary Review*, and *The Crisis*, I accounted for the meaning of repetition and recollection in the three stages of human existence in relation to such important Kierkegaardian themes as time and movement, imagination and love, existence and life-view, the ideal, performance, and commitment, but also habit and metamorphosis. The next chapter will unearth the formation and mechanics of human selfhood in relation to mimesis in Kierkegaard.

Notes

- 1 Some notable exceptions to that are Melberg (1995) and Pickstock (2013).
- 2 Scholars have mostly focused on the etymological meaning of the original Danish *Gjentagelse* that means "the taking back" (see Melberg 1995: 130; Kemp 2016: 225).

- 3 In their translations, the Hongs change the order of the opening sentence by interjecting “an author has said” between “Recollection’s love” and “is the only happy love.”
- 4 Here Kierkegaard introduces a small difference between “I Königstädter Theatret *opføres Possen*” and “I Königstädter Theatret *bliver Possen given*,” respectively.
- 5 While Boven (2018: 115–130) follows Constantin Constantius in thinking that it is the accidental that stirs the subjectivity and imagination, I think it is also the anticlimactic in staging, or the puzzling that shows the paradoxical or contradictory nature of stated claims, or definitions, which sparks and fosters the subjectivity and imagination of the reader seeking to resolve ensuing conundrums.
- 6 Compare with Rene Rosfort’s (2015: 453–467) psychological appraisal of life-view as “pursu[ing] a philosophical objectivity able to secure psychological autonomy” and promising “stability.”

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3 Selfhood, Text, Redoubling

Selfhood is one of the most explored subjects in Kierkegaard's authorship. He discusses the self broadly in his pseudonymous and signed writings and extensively comments on selfhood in his journals. A systematic treatment of the self is most notably present in *The Sickness unto Death*, written by Kierkegaard under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus. The work reveals Kierkegaard as holding a distinct conception of the self that has its roots in both the Christian religious tradition and modern philosophy. With regard to the modern dimension of selfhood, Kierkegaard is greatly indebted to thinkers from the post-Kantian tradition such as Fichte and Hegel, but also to the likes of Locke and Hume. The self in Kierkegaard is radically anti-substantial and fundamentally relational. This relational dimension of the self informs the religious aspect of selfhood in Kierkegaard. The thinker presents the self as ultimately related to the Christian God and other human beings and as affected by a string of "misrelations" that he calls despair and sin.

This chapter brings to light the mimetic dimension of selfhood in Kierkegaard. Taken as a conceptual point of reference, mimesis proves crucial to a nuanced philosophical and religious understanding of the Kierkegaardian self. Mimesis is critical to understanding the self as being in a process of becoming, as having a normative dimension consisting in the task of attaining selfhood, and as being relational. To support my claims, I engage terms and concepts that are either openly mimetic, have mimetic qualities, or should be read in relation to the concept of mimesis. These terms and concepts include *representation*, *imitation*, *reflexivity*, *mirroring*, *desire*, *figuration*, *redoubling*, and *reduplication*.

Section 3.1, "Selfhood, Autobiography, Fiction," expounds Kierkegaard's radically mimetic reading of the structure and formation of human selfhood, which develops in relation to autobiographical and non-autobiographical narratives of the self. I show that the cases of Kierkegaard's textual self-(re)presentation do not simply give accounts of the author's life, but they contribute to the formation of his actual existence. This means that textual representation, hence description, serves as an

existential prescription akin to normative instruction. Kierkegaard's efforts at self-imitation are instances of a modern understanding of mimesis where life emulates art, contrary to the classic rendering of the concept whereby art represents life.

In Section 3.2, "Figuration, Redoubling, Reduplication," I demonstrate that the idea of the existential relationship between author, text, and reader that underwrites the mimetic formation of human selfhood in Kierkegaard is grasped conceptually through his notions of redoubling and reduplication. Engaging these notions, Kierkegaard accounts for the mimetic foundation of the moral-religious self that externally redoubles and reduplicates the internal world of values and beliefs. To support the mimetic appraisal of these concepts, I read redoubling and reduplication in Kierkegaard in relation to the dynamic account of mimesis found in Aristotle, Girard, and Ricoeur.

3.1 Selfhood, Autobiography, Fiction

Kierkegaard's authorship has received relatively little attention and recognition in the field of studies in autobiography. This is surprising for an author of voluminous journals and notebooks, two fictitious diaries, as well as accounts of his authorship, both published and unpublished during his lifetime. Yet, finding that fine line between autobiography and fiction is not an easy task when it comes to Kierkegaard's production. Joakim Garff's *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography* suggests reading Kierkegaard's direct and indirect autobiographical remarks as autobiographically driven or autobiographically inspired; though, some journal entries, such as the famous "great earthquake," "have a clearly autobiographical character" (2005: 14–15, 132–133). Partially in agreement with Garff, Bruce H. Kirmmse opens his *Encounters with Kierkegaard: A Life as Seen by His Contemporaries* with a laconic observation that "Kierkegaard left neither memoirs nor an autobiography" (1996: xi). However, while on the surface a true statement, Kirmmse's claim might well be viewed as somewhat obsolete in light of current research on the autobiography genre (cf. Smith and Watson 2010: 253–286).

My task here is far from settling the debate as to what extent we should take Kierkegaard's remarks as truly autobiographical. I argue that Kierkegaard's writings provide us with reasons to read his autobiographical and fictional texts as examples of the exteriorized presentation of his selfhood, which, after being interiorized by the author, effectively shape his real self. Thus, I contend that we should read Kierkegaard's interaction with autobiographical and fictional textual "versions" of his life as ultimately contributing to the formation of Kierkegaard's sense of the self in actual existence.

This discrete relationship between Kierkegaard and his textual self-representations is underpinned by a reading of the self as essentially

relational and reflexive. This relationality and reflexivity of the self in Kierkegaard is governed by mimesis on three interrelated levels. First, such textual self-representations are instances of Kierkegaard's self-*experimenting* akin to *experimenterende*—"imaginary construction"—from *Repetition*, discussed in the previous two chapters. This self-*experimenting* extends Kierkegaard's real existence in time and space to a form of "independent textual existence" that occurs in autobiographical and fictional texts. Second, such textual existence permits Kierkegaard to access "objectified" representations of himself. The texts act as mirrors doubling the self, yielding at times more than one version of the self. Third, Kierkegaard's engagement with the textual self-representations—fictional or otherwise—influence his actual existence. In this sense, the textual extension of real life becomes mimetically re-appropriated back into real life and, essentially, becomes a part of it.

3.1.1 *Autobiography and Confession*

In his "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," Georges Gusdorf traces the advent of the genre of autobiography to the emergence of the "conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life" and a reversal of a certain natural order of attention from the world to oneself (2014: 29–32). The author attempting their own biography, Gusdorf notices, is someone who deems themselves worthy of remembering. These two factors lead Gusdorf to speak of "a spiritual revolution [where] the artist and the model coincide," meaning the identification of biographer with her object; hence the creation of an autobiographer.

For Gusdorf, autobiography is not simply an opportunity for the author to brag about his achievements. Rather, it is a unique occasion for the author to gain an "immediate" access to oneself, which biography, as a mere historical work, does not provide. Consequently, autobiography brings something new to the subject. Functioning as a mirror that provides the author with their own reflection, autobiography produces "The image [that] is another 'myself,' a double of my being but more fragile and vulnerable, invested with a sacred character that makes it at once fascinating and frightening," states Gusdorf (2014: 32).

As autobiography provides us with a compressed and, at times, quintessential image of ourselves (or is itself that image), which captures and interprets life in a certain totality, it is a valuable source of knowledge of the self. Seizing ourselves in the mirror of autobiography, we are granted a distinctive possibility of seeing ourselves as others perceive us. As I will argue, that unique knowledge obtained through an engagement with autobiography causes autobiography to influence—or, more specifically, co-produce—our selfhood. This co-production results from the "relational" dimension of selfhood. On the one hand, autobiography allows for a relationship between one and oneself. It leads *from one to*

oneself. On the other hand, what was initially the movement from the self to the text is now reversed—the self emerges from the text. In effect, the text contributes to the creation of the self.

The analysis of the reflexivity of selfhood from *The Sickness unto Death* provides a template for the discrete interrelationship between autobiography and selfhood in Kierkegaard. The famous opening from *The Sickness unto Death* presents the establishment of the self drawing on its numerous reflexive relations to itself. These relations are possible through the self's ability to objectify itself and the relations that the self has to itself. Perceived as an object, the self is graspable to itself. This objectification occurs through the self's recognition of its extension as somehow distinct or independent from the self. This self-relation becomes a relation to another. Anti-Climacus says: "The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates to itself and in relating to itself relates to another" (SUD: 13–14/SKS 11: 130; *translation modified*).

This recognition of the self as another allows the self to see itself in a manner that is inaccessible in a normal course of action. Seeing itself through the eyes of another—a seemingly Hegelian point—the self gains new knowledge of itself. The "another" here needs qualification. Defining "another" has been a matter of much debate in Kierkegaardian scholarship. While I agree that the "another" that Kierkegaard has in mind here can be understood as the Christian God or another consciousness of which I can be aware and which can be aware of me (cf. Westphal 1987: 43–44; Evans 1997: 1–15), my claim here is that another is also my own self understood as an object. In other words, while both God and another (human) consciousness are mirrors offering valuable insights to the self—the mirror of the Word and the mirror of consciousness—I see the self in Anti-Climacus as largely interacting with its own objectified extensions produced in reflexive self-relations that have a formative effect on the self.

The self is essentially "the relation to oneself" that builds and expands the self. This self-relation is not a hyper self-identification; the self is not hyper-reflexive, as hyper-reflexivity would neither allow the self to see itself as another nor produce a surplus that augments and creates the self. Properly understood, this building and expansion of the self must be aided by self-recognition that eventually acknowledges the individuality of the self. Anti-Climacus states: "Even in seeing *oneself* in a mirror it is necessary to recognize oneself, for if one does not, one does not see oneself but only a human being" (SUD: 37/SKS 11: 152). This recognition of the self in a mirror, or more precisely, in various mirrors, as Kierkegaard argues in a number of his upbuilding discourses (cf. EUD: 67, 173/SKS 5: 76, 172), has normative implications that prompt the self to take responsibility and ownership over itself. These normative implications mean that becoming a self is the realization of a task.

While Kierkegaard's mirror metaphor unsurprisingly harkens back to the New Testament (James 1:23–25), the advent of autobiography

is strongly linked with the commercialization of mirrors produced by the Venetian technique of silver backing, so argue Gusdorf and Sabine Melchoir-Bonnet, the author of *The Mirror: A History* (2001). One's experience of seeing oneself in a mirror produced in the subject the lived experiences of self-identity against social universality, but also of otherness constituted by a cascade of semblances, distortions, and misrepresentations. Moreover, Melchoir-Bonnet indicates this interplay of selfhood, mirroring, doubling, self-recognition, and introspection was especially fostered by the Christian conception of the human as *imago Dei* (2001: 6). Such a view situates Kierkegaard's conception of the self, while undoubtedly inspired by philosophical trends of the day, as skillfully capturing the human (daily) experience of self-identification and self-recognition in mirrors so emblematic of modernity.

Another mimetic dimension of the self in Kierkegaard crops up in his autobiographical writings when we take the author as the (intended) reader of these texts. Autobiography emerges as an environment in which the self encounters and comprehends itself. Following that understanding of the self's environment, the account of the self represented in an autobiographical narrative is not merely a form of its presentation to or persuasive communication with the external world, but a presentation to and communication with its authorial self; that is, it is a means of engaging with and, in consequence, creating oneself. More specifically, on the one hand, the formation of the self does not just occur "out there" in the world, where the true existence should take place (the ethical-religious), but also unfolds and advances in and through the text, displaying a form of poetic (aesthetic) existence. On the other hand, that type of existence transcends its textual environment and eventually manifests itself in the actuality of one's self.

Autobiography so defined, which in this twofold dialectical movement interrelates the realm of actuality and textual possibility, intersects with Kierkegaard's actual life. Importantly, this textual creation of selfhood is, by and large, a profoundly mimetic phenomenon, because it interconnects the representational and emulative dimensions of Kierkegaard's oeuvre; by emulating one's autobiographical self-representation, Kierkegaard becomes himself as existing in the spatiotemporal world. Yet, as I will argue later in this chapter, a close analysis of Kierkegaard's engagement with multiple, often contradictory textual self-representations points to issues with his understanding of identity and selfhood.

To argue for a dynamic reading of Kierkegaard's autobiographical texts, I would like to briefly account for an important point of departure in that regard, namely Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*. Rousseau's text reimagines the relation between autobiography and its author. As the classic example of the subjective self in literature, Rousseau's "autobiography" is not simply an account of his life. It is a complex and dynamic form of textual representation of the self, which, although

written for a general (learned) audience, serves the author as a mirror for self-examination. To achieve that end, *Confessions* paradigmatically contracts the author and the reader into one.

Rousseau's *Confessions* resonates with the foundational "Western" text in the genre of autobiography, Augustine's *Confessions* (Hartle 1999: 263–285). With some historical reservations, both figures could be perceived as models for Kierkegaard of authors who aimed to textually represent the human subject in time. As such, the confessional style of the expression of the subjective "I" plays an important role in Kierkegaard's authorship for many reasons, some religious and ethical; it might even be said to constitute a certain genre within his literary output. Crucial for this investigation are those aspects of confession that make it a public act of revealing the hidden dimension of the human soul and hence producing material for the subject's self-examination. Although strongly present in the Lutheran tradition, Kierkegaard takes public confession beyond the walls of a church building. Kierkegaard is so fixated on confession [*Tilstaaelse*] that he not only requires it from himself but also demands it from church officials such as Bishop Mynster (JP 6: 6853/SKS 25: 262, NB28: 56). Toward the late production, Kierkegaard stresses the need for a confession that is a form of admission [*Indrømmelse*]. Yet, as I will argue, Kierkegaard's autobiographical admissions and confessions are largely undertaken having him as their main recipient.

Augustine's confessions are made before God. This fact plays out in his sincere attempt to genuinely present to God (and others) the humiliated self. Rousseau is no less driven by the virtues of honesty, sincerity, and authenticity. Yet, he takes the authority of God rather symbolically ("the Sovereign Judge," "O Eternal Being," "Providence," and "Nature"), eventually bringing God to the same level as his fellow men in the very opening of the book (Rousseau 1996: 3). In this move, he is "abridging" God and other people to his fellow men. As a result, I take Rousseau's Judgment Day reference to be signifying human judgment as a whole. Hence, in this sense Rousseau's text has him solely accountable before other human beings. Unlike Augustine, Rousseau confesses before people.

This raises two problems. First, how can the recipients of the book decide whether it truly reflects what it is supposed to reflect? Rousseau's fellow men cannot know him as well as God can. Other human beings, regardless of how close they might be to Rousseau, are not in a position to genuinely compare the book with the actual person of the author. If there is no way of deciding on the relation between the life of Rousseau described in the book and that of the real person of Rousseau, it seems that the spectators of his endeavor will never become the true witnesses of his confession. Second, his fellow men will not respond with their own confessions, as Rousseau expects them to do, believing that his confession will prompt them to replicate his attempt at self-examination. Yet, even if his fellow men could reproduce in their life the feat of Rousseau's

Confessions, Rousseau clearly indicates the inimitable character of his work. The very first sentence of the book states that his work does not have a precedent (“I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent”) and will not be repeated in the future (“and which will never find an imitator”) (Rousseau 1996: 3).

Both problems force us to rethink our usual way of reading the genre of autobiographical confession. Regarding the first problem, Rousseau wants us to engage with the book by means of abstracting from or “suspending” the actual historical figure that walked the streets of Geneva. Following that appraisal, one could say that the real addressees desired by the thinker—the fellow men—are the readers of the delivered text. It is not God, but “The readers ... [who] are put in the position of an audience, as simultaneous witnesses and judges of Rousseau’s *I*,” say Gebauer and Wulf (1995: 210). Following the life-story of the author, the readers determine the authenticity of the author solely by judging the text. This implies that the author is not external to the text, although one is initially “detached” from it, but the voice within it. The text, for Rousseau, is an artwork, a space where the authenticity of the author can be traced, and this is how he himself wants to be identified. This inaccessibility of the real person can be mitigated by the accessibility of the book that says things blatantly without redactions and concealments. Hence, in contrast to Augustine, who often presents dogmatic explanations of his shameful behaviors as traceable to “a normal condition of a sinful being,” Rousseau mercilessly exposes his own wickedness as instigated by weakness of the will, susceptibility to passions, but also caused by social-economic circumstances (Kelly 1987: 103–106).

Let us look back at the second problem of the programmatic inimitability of Rousseau’s literary achievement. I take this utterance not as a sign of his arrogance and vanity, but rather as a suggestion that his work is written first and foremost with him as the intended reader of the book in mind. While I agree with Gebauer and Wulf that Rousseau’s “autobiography is thus much more than a description of a life or even the production of his own life,” and that “[a]s a support for his interpretation, Rousseau needs the reader, who shared his view and defends it along with him” (1995: 206), I claim that this intended reader is essentially Rousseau himself. We see intimations of Rousseau’s identification with the intended reader of the book when he says:

Myself alone! I know the feelings of my heart, and I know men. I am not made like any of those I have seen; I venture to believe that I am not made like any of those who are in existence. If I am not better, I am different. Whether Nature has acted rightly or wrongly in destroying the mould in which she cast me, can only be decided after I have been read.

(Rousseau 1996: 3)

In this passage, Rousseau transitions from the position of the author into the one who is supposed to decide whether the work is genuine or not. The upshot is a further contraction of the three parties to the confessional trope, according to which the author, the work, and the reader have been collapsed into one. Rousseau himself is the writer, the judging authority, and the recipient. He is also the book *himself*. In his task of presenting “the likeness of a man,” Rousseau offers more than an analysis of his life; he offers himself.

3.1.2 *Self-Formation and Negotiation*

Rousseau’s narrative self-presentation prefigures Kierkegaard’s “single individual” by producing an effect of distancing of Rousseau’s self from the selves of others (“If I am not better, at least I am different”). The act of writing and reading his own self (“after I have been read”) in Rousseau corresponds with Kierkegaard’s narrative self-examination. Conceding to Rousseau that his *Confessions* is without precedent, I nonetheless argue that his expectation that his endeavor will not find “imitators” goes unfulfilled. In fact, among such “imitators” is Kierkegaard, who “takes” Rousseau’s *Confessions* to another level by treating his own autobiographical remarks as formative in relation to his own self. More specifically, I claim that Kierkegaard’s autobiographical narratives participate in a formative process of the self—hence, the formation of the self—through a continuous and repetitive procedure of self-recognition, self-interpretation, self-understanding, and self-creation.

This self-formation is not only a representation of his selfhood, but also a part of Kierkegaard’s dynamic self-imitation undertaken *via* a textual externalization of his self. Thus, in this section, I illustrate the advancement of Kierkegaard’s accounts of himself and his authorship over the course of his writing that deeply demonstrates the mimetic formation of his self. This formation of the self requires from Kierkegaard continuous renegotiations of the past. It occurs often in relation to more than one “version” of his life at a given time. Drawing on Gusdorf’s perspective on the complexity of biographies, I understand Kierkegaard’s autobiography to be more than “a simple recapitulation of the past; it is also the attempt and the drama of a man struggling to reassemble himself in his own likeness at a certain moment of his history” (2014: 43). This perpetual re-representation of his own self to himself, I see in his gradually fluctuating understanding and interpretation of the relationship to his authorship and God, as well as his place in the world, expressive of the desires, values, and *telos* of the self.

A close analysis of Kierkegaard’s accounts of his authorship and its role in his life shows both their inconsistency and his gradual realization of the discrepancies between various, mostly past accounts of

his life and work and his attempts to negotiate and reconcile these accounts. This analysis sheds some light on his rendering of the self and its formation,

The year 1846 marks the publication of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, written by the pseudonymous Johannes Climacus. In this book, Kierkegaard for the first time both publicly admits “the ownership” of his pseudonyms and informs his readers about the objectives of his authorship by clarifying the relation between signed and pseudonymous publications. This year is also crucial since it is the turning point in Kierkegaard’s production. The *Postscript* is to be the last of his literary enterprise, and the Dane is about to make his life as a rural pastor somewhere in Denmark (JP 5: 5873/SKS 18: 278, JJ: 415). In the chapter “A First and Last Explanation” from the *Postscript*, the author explains that although his pseudonyms are his creation, they represent independent perspectives on the issues they discuss and what they claim should be assigned only to them, not to Kierkegaard himself (CUP1: 627/SKS 7: 571). Pseudonymous works are deemed less essential than the signed ones as they are aesthetic writings. Reading them as containing religious thoughts would be misleading. Merely through their aesthetic character, their role is to draw attention to an inward reading of “the old familiar text handed down from the fathers.” Importantly, in this section, Kierkegaard refers to “Governance” as the “who” that played an inspirational role in his publishing endeavor (CUP1: 628/SKS 7: 572).

As will become more obvious later, Kierkegaard’s attempt to cease writing is, however, unsuccessful. It stands not as the only one, but as the first one. Similarly, “A First and Last Explanation,” despite its title, is not to be the last one. Roughly two years later, in 1848, Kierkegaard writes another “explanation” concerning his authorship. It appears in a shortened version in 1851 under the title *On My Work as an Author*, and in a full version posthumously in 1859 as *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*. The last one in this group of autobiographical writings, not mentioning Kierkegaard’s extensive journal entries, is *Armed Neutrality*, written in 1849 and published in 1880.

“The Accounting,” which is the first chapter from *On My Work as an Author* (written in 1848) provides readers with a different explanation of the relation between Kierkegaard’s signed and pseudonymous works from the one presented in the *Postscript*, two years earlier (1846). Here Kierkegaard does not distance himself from the pseudonymous production; on the contrary, he claims that the pseudonymous works *are, and have been*, an inherent part of the production as a whole since the very beginning (PV: 5–6/SKS 13: 12).

Now, signed and pseudonymous writings taken together represent the religious in the authorship. In claiming this, Kierkegaard does not simply

change his mind about his authorship as such; rather, by interweaving his work with his life, he exposes us to an altered autobiographical interpretation of himself. While he at first sees no conflict between that claim and what he said about his authorship years earlier in *Postscript*, in 1850 he begins to see some cracks in the supposed correspondence between the claims. Kierkegaard's recognition of the inconsistency between the two different views on authorship is noted in a journal entry from 1850, tellingly entitled: "Regarding a Statement in the Postscript to 'Concluding Postscript' with Respect to Publishing the Books about My Work as an Author." Therein, Kierkegaard comments on the relation between annotations concerning his authorship and autobiography in those two publications. While cautiously affirming some evolution in his understanding of himself as an existing person and of his authorship, he indicates a strong connection between the two. Kierkegaard admits that in fact he did not have the correct overview of his authorship at the beginning and that his writings underwent some development. He also tries to reconcile these perspectives:

With regard to that, it may be observed *both* that what I wrote then can be altogether true and that what I wrote later just as true, simply because at that time I was not as advanced in my development, still had not come to an understanding of the definitive idea for all my writing.

Finally, I must add: This is how I understand the totality *now*; by no means did I have this overview of the whole from the beginning, no more than I dare say that I immediately perceived that the *telos* of the pseudonyms was maieutic, since this, too, was like a phase of poetic-emptying in my own life-development.

(JP 6: 6654/SKS 23: 392–393, NB20: 5; *italics mine*)

Several things have to be noted with regard to this passage. First, it is a clear example of what Gusdorf calls "the original sin of autobiography" (2014: 41). Kierkegaard tries to retain some form of consistency and continuity in his accounts of the past. To do so, he has to find a rule or a hermeneutical key that will allow him to put into perspective and eventually combine different pasts into one.

Second, the work of autobiography is in fact something historical that gives a certain *now* to "that which is in the process of being formed" (Gusdorf 2014: 41). This ties in with what has just been noted, where Kierkegaard links reason with temporality and totality in his "This is how I understand the totality *now*." Commenting on *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard notes: "The present work is an *interpretation* of something past, something traversed, something *historical*" (PV: 271/Pap. IX-B 57, 347).

Third, one can observe in the passage a strong connection between Kierkegaard's perspective on his production and the way in which the

author perceives himself—he refers to part of his writings as a “phase of poetic-emptying in [his] own life-development.” His perception of his authorship, and in effect of himself, changes over the course of his writings.¹ A particular movement occurs within “life-development,” as he calls the whole enterprise. This movement is a formation of Kierkegaard in and through his own literary production. He is the first to see inconsistencies in his accounts of the pasts; he is the first to negotiate them. Hence, he is the first reader of his own literary composition, and its first exegete and commentator. In the process of constant reading, re-reading, and interpretation, Kierkegaard continuously negotiates and reestablishes his own sense of selfhood and identity.

In his textual projection of himself, we see the author trying to apply some sort of methodology, a higher sense, and a *telos* simultaneously to his production and to his own life. The notion of “Governance,” which had previously played a limited role serving as mere inspiration in Kierkegaard’s literary enterprise, grows in importance over the course of the writing process. Finally, in the chapter “Governance’s Part in My Authorship” from *The Point of View for My Work as an Author: A Direct Communication, Report to History*, published posthumously in 1859, Kierkegaard claims that his writing process is identical with his upbringing managed by Governance (PV: 76-77/SKS 16: 56).

It is readily observable that Kierkegaard can no longer maintain what he claimed beforehand, namely that he as an author had an overview of the whole dialectical structure of his writing production from the very beginning. In his mature summation, he sees less self-authorship of his own life and his production, and more of a role for Governance in both. The merits of Kierkegaard’s authorship do not give him much credit; Governance stands behind the production. Laying things out in such a way allows Kierkegaard to recognize and re-create a fairly unified version of himself within the text. It also posits new issues of the “who” of the authorial voice of the production—an unresolved problem with which Kierkegaard unsuccessfully wrestled in the bulk of writings that ultimately were not published during his lifetime.

Yet, that unified vision of his selfhood, of his past, has cracks, again. In the “Epilogue” to the posthumously published *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard significantly softens the claim of his meager role in the authorship. He claims that although Governance stands behind the production, he himself is by the will of that Governance extraordinary; indeed, verging on genius (PV: 94/SKS 13: 73–74).² However, presenting himself in this particular light of “the extraordinary (verging on genius)” is not his last word on the subject. A very different, if not contradictory image of Kierkegaard is introduced in another work, parallel to *The Point of View*, namely *Armed Neutrality*. Therein he presents himself as quite dispensable—an accidental player—in disclosing to the readers the very essence of the truly Christian (PV: 140/SKS 16: 121–122).

This and other deviations from a unified vision of his pasts show that autobiography is dynamic. It is the autobiographer here who does not simply produce his autobiography for others to read at some point in time; rather, autobiography is a peculiar mirror that allows the author to see oneself as another, to correct oneself, and, paradoxically, to correct the mirror.

3.1.3 *Selfhood and Fiction*

To this point, I have demonstrated that mimesis is an important component of Kierkegaard's project of the becoming of the self that develops in relation to his autobiographical remarks. While it is generally understood that text is the medium through which an author communicates with a reader, I have rendered autobiography as a temporal and topical externalization of the internal communication of the author with himself. In this subsection, I argue that the textual formation of the self also occurs in Kierkegaard's fictional texts. Thus, similarly to his autobiographical entries, the pseudonymous and fictitious part of his authorship comprises not only a robust conception of the self, but also a powerful account of the process of its formation. Both the conception of the self and its formation in fictional texts are deeply informed by mimesis.

Kierkegaard's textual engineering of the self in such non-autobiographical texts is achieved by what he calls *experimenting* a person. He accomplishes this feat by inventing fictional characters whom he observes, analyzes, and, in some instances, imitating their features and incorporating them into his own life. One such *experimented* character is in fact his fictional representation and, hence, a textual extension of himself through which Kierkegaard achieves in the world of text that which he desires to accomplish in real life.

Through his *psychologiske Experiment*—the imaginary psychological construction—Kierkegaard accomplishes several goals. As argued in the previous chapter, by engaging the imaginary psychological construction, Kierkegaard makes some crucial philosophical and theological points but also offers vital insights into the subjects of art, theater, representation, religion, love, and spirituality. One important objective behind his *psychologiske Experiment* is that of learning intimately about an array of “real possibilities” of existence, which at times come closer to or move farther away from the ideal of authentic existence when faced with the pressing questions of life. While being “merely” of an imaginary nature, Kierkegaard is strongly committed to the idea that studying these characters reveals something crucial about a range of human experiences of and attitudes toward existence.

Psychologiske Experiment is also Kierkegaard's response to several unsatisfactory ways of probing into the depths of human existence.³ Expounding the imaginary construction in *Concluding Unscientific*

Postscript, its pseudonymous author, Climacus, appraises it as an educational technique, which he situates “in-between” “‘learning by rote’ and an ‘intellectual exercise’” (CUP1: 264/SKS 7: 240). The imaginary construction is not simply one or the other, but rather a synthesis of both. On the one hand, while irreducible to mindless repetition, *psychological experimenting* has a habitual character of learning through repetition. It assumes that what is learnt must be practiced. On the other hand, while not a pure speculative exercise, it is “a good exploratory means” (CUP1: 264/SKS 7: 240) that engages speculative philosophical concepts and imagination. Imaginary construction is then an investigative philosophical method that can be universally utilized by agents who are invested in an analysis of the array of possible existences. Such researchers of life are those whose life-views are oriented toward “*existing*.”

Imaginary construction operates also on a nuanced level of human affectivity, which Kierkegaard explains using implicit references to mimesis. Speaking of the earnestness of communication in *Postscript*, Climacus indicates that the reader’s capacity for or disposition of earnestness can detect the earnestness of the author, despite the fact that the author effectively “keeps the earnestness essentially to himself” (CUP1: 264/SKS 7: 240). The reader’s earnestness is mimetically and affectively stimulated and activated by the earnestness of the author. This cryptic and largely noncognitive account of the role of imaginary construction in kindling and developing earnestness in the reader resonates with Kierkegaard’s more comprehensive description of imaginary construction and, interestingly, the role of the imaginary constructor in the posthumously published *The Book on Adler*. Therein, Kierkegaard refers to the unconscious and visceral mimetic phenomenon of attunement and bodily reaction he finds in the herd behavior of animals. He says,

If the imaginary construction has made any impression [*Indtryk*], it must be like that which happens when the wing strokes of the wild bird, in being heard overhead by the tame birds of the same kind who live securely in the certainty of actuality, cause these to beat their wings instinctively, because those wing strokes are simultaneously unsettling and yet also have something fascinating.

(BA 16/SKS 15: 101–102)

Here the effect produced by the imaginary construction is unconscious, reactive, and imitative. It operates on the noncognitive level and fits well with the description of crowd behavior, where a type of behavior represented by an animal from a particular group triggers a chain of reactive behaviors from the members of the group or its observers (Kameda and Hastie 2015). As will be discussed in Chapter 6, such alerting herd behaviors in humans include panic and rioting, but also clapping hands, cheering, compassion, and empathy. In both cases of the proliferation

of earnestness and wing stroking, Kierkegaard utilizes his knowledge of mimesis understood as affective and visceral mood sharing and triggering, which can also be startling or unsettling.

Another link between the imaginary construction and mimesis crops up when we read it in relation to mimesis in Plato and Aristotle. The Platonic theme in the imaginary construction becomes visible in its core feature that offers a mediated character of the authorial voice (*Republic*, 392–394; Halliwell 2014: 129). More specifically, in his pseudonymous authorship, Kierkegaard does not speak in his own name. He speaks through pseudonyms. Doing so, he distances and removes himself from the characters and lets them speak on their own. Speaking of his authorial voice in “Guilty?/Not Guilty?” Kierkegaard notes:

In the story of suffering ... I am just as remote from being Quidam of the imaginary construction as from being the imaginary constructor [Frater Taciturnus], just as remote, since the imaginary constructor is a poetically actual subjective thinker and what is imaginatively constructed is his psychologically consistent production.

(CUP1: 626/SKS 7: 570)

This multilayered configuration of removed authorship is even greater when we take Hilarius Bookbinder, the editor of *Stages on Life's Way*, as part of the layer cake. Such an authorial removal in Kierkegaard's production shows that while a great admirer of Plato, in this aspect of mimesis, Kierkegaard deviates from his master. This is the case because, on the one hand, for Plato, distancing oneself from one's authorial voice is tantamount to a lack of responsibility that characterizes a painter (and a poet), who is thrice *removed* from truth (*Republic*, 597e). On the other hand, speaking in someone's voice represents for Plato narrative imitation in its most dangerous form. By engaging narrative imitation to represent someone else's voice, we attempt to undertake a wicked imitation of that very person. Such imitation compromises the ideal of being oneself. Plato says in *Republic*: “Now, to make oneself like someone else in voice or appearance is to imitate the person one makes oneself like” (*Republic*, 393c). Thus, without dismissing Plato's worries, Kierkegaard sides more with Aristotle in his view of mimesis regarding authorship. Indeed, Aristotle's view of mimesis as dynamic and formative substantially informs the overall project of the imaginary construction.

Yet, imaginary constructions cannot satisfy the spatiotemporal requirements of existence. To be a Christian means to be one *in concreto*. They prove especially challenging to Kierkegaard in the context of his long-standing desire to be a genuine Christian. In response to these challenges, he, on the one hand, renounces the authority of someone claiming to be a Christian. On the other hand, one cannot dismiss the fact that he is in possession of knowledge of the demands of an authentic existence; as we

know, his knowledge is guaranteed by his continuous Socratic declaration that he is not one himself. Like Moses, Kierkegaard leads others to the Promised Land, never himself setting foot there.

Ultimately, Kierkegaard relinquishes neither his desire to become a Christian nor his proclivity to engage in fictional existences. His journal entries and works marking the beginning of the so-called second authorship express his insistence on the harsh requirements of Christianity that must culminate in martyrdom. In 1848, he says, "Being a Christian is neither more nor less, without a doubt neither more nor less, than being a martyr; every Christian, that is, every true Christian, is a martyr" (JP 1: 481/SKS 20: 392, NB5:48). This martyrdom must accomplish what Kierkegaard calls an awakening.

Martyrdom and awakening are the guiding themes of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous essay "Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?" A close reading of this peculiar essay, following René Girard's theory of "mimetic desire," presents us with a fictitious extension of Kierkegaard into a man who represents the quintessential example of a Christian. This ideal Christian, whose life is governed by a firm resolution to become a martyr, is also a perfected version of Kierkegaard, who dramatically struggles with the requirement and, in fact, the very possibility of martyrdom; it represents Kierkegaard the martyr. Kierkegaard achieves such a textual existence by first producing a fictitious representation of himself in the essay by H.H. and by ultimately breaking the link between Kierkegaard the author and Kierkegaard the martyr by putting H.H. to death. This act "frees" Kierkegaard the martyr from the confines of the conventional distinction between real and ideal existence.

While it is hard to definitively pinpoint the authorial voices in "Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?" three figures can be identified in it. First, we have Kierkegaard, who is the actual author of the piece. Second, we have H.H., who is the pseudonymous author of the essay. Lastly, the essay treats an unknown figure of a man experimented by H.H.—this I understand to be Kierkegaard the martyr.

This last figure enters the picture early on in the Introduction, where he is initially presented as a disturbed child wrestling with the eponymous question of the essay. Over the course of his life, the man trains himself to become a martyr, the feat he most likely accomplishes. This is undoubtedly a very radical iteration of Kierkegaard's preoccupation with the *imitatio Christi* tradition, which, although discussed directly in the next chapter, has important implications for this chapter. While we do not have many resources to consult in our search for a decisive interpretation of both the content of the work and the relation between the three figures of the essay, I propose reading H.H.'s experimenting as representing a development of Kierkegaard's imagined Christian self. Such a reading of this difficult and

ambiguous text suggests that Kierkegaard authorizes H.H. to conduct an experiment that will resolve the question of the requirement and possibility of Christian martyrdom in modernity. The official response to the question is negative. Yet, H.H. is dead; we learn as much from the subtitle of the essay “A Posthumous Work of a Solitary Human Being. A Poetical Venture” (WA: 51/SKS11:57).

H.H. is dead for two reasons. First, the experimented figure of the man essentially convinces H.H. that martyrdom is both required for genuine Christianity and in fact possible in the modern world. The unnamed man’s martyrdom brings about an awakening among the “busy,” “commonsensical,” and “apathetic” Christians, and H.H. is his first follower. Second, Kierkegaard puts H.H. to death to free his dialectical fictitious extension (Kierkegaard the martyr and the ideal Christian) from the confines of textual existence. To understand the mechanics of this unusual move better, we have to understand Kierkegaard’s reasons for it, which are located in his deep desire to become a genuine Christian coupled with his awareness of the philosophical and dogmatical problems entailed in becoming a genuine Christian. While the philosophical and dogmatic issues related to the project of becoming a genuine Christian will be remarked upon here (and dealt with in detail in the next chapter), I will primarily turn to the mimetic theory of Girard to explain the role of desire in Kierkegaard’s business of textual killing.

According to Girard, all human beings are driven by unconscious mimetic desire. We desire many things, such as material objects, but also recognition, social status, or the love of other people. After fulfilling our basic needs, we desire knowledge concerning our ultimate being; our sense of meaning, which as modern subjects we lack, according to Girard, is frequently imitated from “some other person [who] seems to possess [it]” (1979: 146). The other person is the mimetic model for Girard, and by imitating that model, and precisely by appropriating as one’s own the model’s desires, the imitator succeeds in acquiring their “own” being. Following that understanding, the Christian existence expressed by one’s commitment to imitate Christ (“this Crucified One, who was God, the Holy One ... insofar as a human being can resemble him” WA: 55/SKS 11: 61) is the subject of desire in the essay. However, this form of mimesis cannot be direct, and it takes place *via* a model, a prototype, or as is the case in this essay, initially by a picture of the Crucified Christ, but ultimately by the figure of Kierkegaard the martyr.

Mimetic desire operates on an unconscious and affective level. Girard says: “man is subject to intense desires though he may not know precisely for what” (1979: 146). The affective and unconscious dimension of the imitation of desires cannot be properly scrutinized. H.H. clearly suggests that acts caused and fueled by desires are neither explainable nor justifiable. Indeed, the description of the man approaching the picture of the Crucified Christ is rife with references to unconscious desire. At the

beginning, as a child, the man does not know what this “almost irresistible urge” is that attracts him to the picture; he is simply “driven by an inexplicable power to want to resemble him [Christ crucified]” (WA: 55/SKS 11: 61). As he grows older, the “picture [acquires] even more power over him.” The picture dominates the man. He loses himself in the picture and becomes possessed by it. The imitation of the representation of the crucified Christ leads to the imitation of its desires. Indeed, the image of the crucified Christ is a robust and unrestrained representation of the desire to die like Christ. We see that the man wants to “become himself the picture that resembled him, the Crucified One” (WA: 55/SKS 11: 61).

Desires are problematic for Girard. The convergence of desires results in rivalry between different parties who desire a particular thing, but also between the different parts of the triangular relationship of mimetic desire. Here, rivalry can also be related to the alternation between a specifically modern desiring to be (in) the image of God and desiring to be God. Yet, the latter is not what Kierkegaard is himself worried about here. H.H. is aware of this problem and preemptively states that “there was nothing presumptuous in [the man’s] desire” (WA: 55/SKS 11: 61). The man is aware of being a sinner and of the difference between him and the Holy One. The man does not want to become Christ, although Christ, as portrayed here, is the ultimate object of his desire.

Rather, Kierkegaard’s enterprise of creating the man who proves himself to be a genuine Christian through martyrdom addresses the need for a model of Christian existence. Kierkegaard’s search for such a figure is dictated by his conviction that our imitation of the ideal Christian will allow us to become Christians ourselves. We need a prototype of Christian existence that is in the state of becoming, contrary to Christ, who, as he clarifies in *Armed Neutrality*, “is presented [in Holy Scripture] more in being than in becoming, or actually is presented only in being” (PV: 131/SKS 16: 113). Imitating the model of the ideal Christian represented by the man, a.k.a. Kierkegaard the martyr, Kierkegaard can poetically fulfill his deep desire to be a genuine Christian.

A journal entry from 1849 on *The Sickness unto Death* (Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous work published simultaneously with *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*) sheds a problematic light on his project of poetic existence. His longing to be a “very simple Christian” is opposed to being and existing in a poetic manner (JP 6: 6431/SKS 22:127–128, NB11:204). Instead of becoming an actual being, Kierkegaard is worried that he merely poetically prescribes himself as that. In wanting one thing, Kierkegaard could actually pursue another (cf. Girard 2001: 14–15). His project of existential Christianity could amount to a failed fiction. Yet, dismissing Kierkegaard’s fictitious self-production as merely an extravagant literary gimmick does not really get to the heart of his view of the link between literature or fiction and real existence. As I explain in the following section, Kierkegaard takes mimesis as a key to his explication of the structure of

the formation of human selfhood in relation to a temporally structured narrative. In this regard, Kierkegaard follows Aristotle's conceptualization of mimesis and largely prefigures Paul Ricoeur's mimetic arc.

3.2 Figuration, Redoubling, Reduplication

Before we throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater by dismissing Kierkegaard's engagement with fictitious self-representations as mere wishful thinking and poetic musing, it is important to return to two important theoreticians of mimesis, Aristotle and Ricoeur, to shed more light on the subject. Kierkegaard is an avid reader of Aristotle and has a good understanding of his poetics and mimesis. Ricoeur provides a fruitful perspective on mimesis and fiction in Kierkegaard. Their respective conceptualizations of mimesis as being directed at human action reveal important dimensions of fiction as an action-generating structure in Kierkegaard's thought.

3.2.1 Aristotle, Ricoeur, Figuration

Contrary to Plato, whose conceptualization of mimesis is centered around the axiological dimension of representation, measured by proportion, scale, kinship, and likeness, Aristotle's notion of mimesis is focused on the ideal of perfection understood as quintessential of representation. Plato envisages a "good" copy as undeviatingly resembling the original ("imitation of ideal form," Burwick 2001: 50), while Aristotle sees the copy as often surpassing and perfecting the model, whether faultless or not. Plato expects artists to ultimately direct viewers' attention away from a deficient particular toward the universal, which he considers to be perfect beings. Aristotle's disagreement with Plato's ontology orients his rendering of mimesis away from focusing solely on imagery and the visual (Hagberg 1984: 366). Thus, Aristotle's understanding of mimesis has two dimensions: It is used in the sense of producing images (Platonic influence) and in the sense of creating a fable or a plot (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 53). Put differently, while Plato is focused on representing objects, Aristotle's mimesis aims at representing action (Melberg 1995: 43–45). For Aristotle, the very act of imitation has three aspects, and the artist in his act of imitation always exemplifies one of these three modes of representation: "The poet being an imitator, like a painter or any other artist, must of necessity imitate one of three objects, things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be" (*Poetics* 1460b).

Even when representing objects, a poet should not just make them present by how they appear, but more by what they truly are, revealing their essences and the relations between them (Hagberg 1984: 366–368). In a sense, art production wedges itself in between what is and what could be;

it is based on the “principle of probability and necessity” (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 54). Such a synthesis can be explained by the fact that for Aristotle, “art and poetry aim much at ‘beautifying’ and ‘improving’ individual features, at *universalization*. Mimesis is thus copying and changing in one,” Gebauer and Wulf note (1995: 54). Imitation is natural to us, and largely unavoidable; we learn by imitation—mostly by way of imitation of action. Children learn by imitation, and in imitating, they *do* what they see adults *do*.

Lastly, Aristotle’s mimesis accounts for the mental processes that are (often) behind acts of imitation. Following S. H. Butcher, Aristotle’s mimesis presents “external process or result [as linked with] inward process, a psychological energy working outwards [and] everything that expresses the mental life, that reveals a rational personality ... mental processes, spiritual movements” (1951: 123). Mimesis in Aristotle, especially in its mature form, is then an active phenomenon that originates in the inwardness of an individual and has its expression outward in both representing and altering (Burwick 2001: 79). An imitator aims at representing outwardly what he or she conceives of the represented object, and thus in effect transforms the conceived object into its perfected possibility.

Though this point seems to have escaped the notice of scholars studying the subject of imitation in Kierkegaard, he is indeed familiar with Aristotelian mimesis and has a surprisingly nuanced understanding of it. Around the time Kierkegaard is entertaining the idea of writing *Repetition* (1842–1843), he jots in his journal a remark on Aristotle’s account of the link between poetry and imitation: “‘All poetry is imitation’ (Aristotle)—‘better or worse than we are.’ Hence poetry points beyond itself to actuality and to the metaphysical ideality” (JP 1: 144/SKS 19: 376, Not 12:8). This comment offers two important insights about Aristotle’s mimesis. First, Kierkegaard indicates that imitation, as he understands it in Aristotle, is not about realistic representation, but rather is a concept, with which “confrontation” or “engagement” allows us to become “better or worse than we are.” Kierkegaard rightly zooms in on the creative aspect on the part of the imitator. Second, imitation *via* poetry links actuality, hence the real that occurs in time, the historical, with ideality, thus the realm of the ideal, the timeless, imagination. As he points out earlier in another journal entry, “Poetry is glorification (i.e., transfiguration) of life by way of its clarification” (JP 1: 136/SKS 18: 10, EE: 11), which, doubtlessly resonating with the Aristotelian mimesis and poetics, means that poetry perfects human life and transforms it (cf. FT: xxiii).

Aristotle’s creative, interpretative, and life-enhancing mimesis is the grounding of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. It features prominently in Ricoeur’s theory of figuration, also called the “mimetic arc.” An analysis of Ricoeur’s thought offers a rich and informative lens through which we can understand Kierkegaard’s engagement with fiction and Aristotle’s mimesis more broadly. The following exposition of Ricoeur’s account

of the mimetic in fiction helps us to comprehend Kierkegaard's peculiar relationship *to* and *with* his own texts, which entails imagination and a novel understanding of the reader, and has a transformative effect on the being of the actual existing individual. In that sense *by* means of text, mimesis governs and effects the becoming of the actual self.

Ricoeur introduces the idea of the mimetic arc to argue that our sense of selfhood and personal identity are linked with narratively structured representations of human actions. The mimetic arc is a threefold process of "figuration." The three parts of the arc are "prefiguration" (mimesis¹), "configuration" (mimesis²), and "refiguration" (mimesis³). They account for human interactions with stories and the role of stories in *prefiguring* human self-understanding. Ricoeur writes, "what certain fictions re-describe is, precisely, human action itself. ... [T]he first way human beings attempt to understand and to master the 'manifold' of the practical field is to give themselves a fictive representation of it" (1991: 176). Ricoeur understands the great achievement of human literary legacy as a multifarious and diverse repository of human experiences that offer us symbols, words, and language to think (about) our selfhood. This pre-existing depository of templates of existence prefigures our selfhood, hence it is called prefiguration. The second stage in the mimetic arc is configuration, which is the action of configuring, telling, and hearing a story. In configuration, various elements of the story receive their structure. The story takes a beginning, plot, and some ending—these are all aspects of what Ricoeur calls *employment*. Lastly, we have refiguration, which builds a bridge between narrative configurations and temporal human existence. This concept allows the reader to apply those "narrative configurations" to an actual human life.

Especially important for our investigation of Ricoeurian mimesis is his insistence on human engagement with fiction as demanding Aristotelian creativity and interpretation. However, for Ricoeur, interpretation means something more than creative perfection. Moving beyond Aristotle, Ricoeur's notion of interpretation implements text back into life. Textual description created in the process of figuration must now be taken as existential prescription. Hence, the implied mimetic process in interpretation signifies representing in real life that which has already been presented in the imaginative description. This imitative transition from literary representation to representation in action in real life he calls a movement from "seeing-as" to "being-as." He says: "I even suggested that 'seeing-as,' which sums up the power of metaphor, could be the revealer of a 'being-as' on the deepest ontological level" (Ricoeur 1984: xi). In this way, Ricoeur seeks to show that texts and stories are not mere fictions; they also inform us about the world as it is and as it could be, or even sometimes as it should be.

Reading Kierkegaard's affair with creating textual self-representations alongside both Aristotle and Ricoeur reveals an even more

complex relationship between selfhood and fiction in the Dane's writings. Kierkegaard's autobiographical and non-autobiographical representations are not simply fantasy or, for that matter, corrective mirrors; rather, they are blueprints of and prescriptions for Kierkegaard's selfhood. Subsequently, I read Kierkegaard's attempt to create the would-be Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard the martyr and the ideal Christian) as, in the Aristotelian sense of imitation, a perfecting of oneself in imaginative representation. Indeed, on the one hand, Kierkegaard's ideal self is represented as being in becoming. In his depiction of the young man growing into adulthood, undertaking guerrilla training and committing oneself to martyrdom, Kierkegaard is drawing heavily on Aristotle's mimesis of action.

On the other hand, Kierkegaard's textual representation takes the shape of Ricoeur's emplotment. The link between the formation of a poetic composition and that of reading indicates the transition within the narrative arc from narrative "configuration" to "refiguration." Subsequently, as the first reader of the text, Kierkegaard gains the capacity to finish the process of mimetic hermeneutics by reduplicating in his real life the set of experiences derived from the text. This is how Schweiker understands the existential-mimetic facet of Kierkegaard's textuality: "Existence is the troubled attempt to reduplicate in life what is passionately held to be true" (1990: 144). Moreover, as a reader of his own texts, Kierkegaard is able to become what he "projects" in narrative through his *interpretation* of the text (Vanhooser 1990: 98, 104). Such an existential hermeneutic overcomes the distance between the text and its reader-interpreter. The mimetic refiguration that follows the act of reading consists first and foremost in the internalization of the read text into one's life and, consequently, in *interpretation* that amounts to the act of self-representation (cf. Stiver 2001: 56–79). Refiguration is then a performative act of self-actualization and embodiment—it occurs in space and time.

Following Ricoeur's mimetic arc, we can understand Kierkegaard's "real" life as dependent upon, or mediated through, a textual representation of himself. Kierkegaard as an author initially configures, or in his own vocabulary, *experiments* a thorough fictive representation of his anticipated self. Then, as a reader engaging in the process of "refiguration," he incorporates that textual representation of himself into his own "real self." In this way, writing and reading is a process of self-understanding, encapsulating oneself, and self-formation that is stretched between two worlds: the actual and the fictive.

Kierkegaard's rendering of the relationship between mimesis, fiction, and selfhood gains new light when read in relation to reader-response theory. While reader-response theory has been customarily set in contrast to the phenomenological hermeneutic under which one would locate Ricoeur's thought, this theory is applicable when, as we have established, we take Kierkegaard as the intended reader of his autobiographical and

non-autobiographical texts. Reader-response theory emphasizes the role of the reader in defining or extracting meaning from texts in contrast to the belief that the very structure of the text shapes meaning in all potential readers in a similar way. While Kierkegaard is arguably attentive to both ideas, his pseudonymous essay “Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?” invites the reader to individually respond to its eponymous title. Applicable here is a dictum from Lichtenberg quoted by Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous author of a different essay, “In Vino Veritas” written by William Afham: “Such works are mirrors; when an ape looks in, no apostle can look out” (SLW: 8/SKS 6:16). Kierkegaard’s invocation of Lichtenberg’s dictum emphasizes the role of the reader as someone who brings the world of their experience into the text and independently generates its meaning. On the one hand, one should not simply mimic or copy the meaning expressed in H.H.’s essay; this suggests a lower form of imitation that Lichtenberg attributes to apes. One should consciously engage in the meaning-making process that results from the reading experience.

On the other hand, how we interpret the text depends largely on who we are as readers. The worlds of the titular apostle and ape are dramatically different. Indeed, H.H.’s essay clearly states that one does not have the right to be killed by some other to witness to the truth, yet the main protagonist is set on the course of martyrdom. As Iben Damgaard notes: “Reading is a dialog with the concepts and possibilities that are ‘captured’ in the text and their ‘release’ depends on the reader’s response” (2010: 223). The reader’s response provides the scope for the real distance between thought and existence, but it is also a means to bridge it. Kierkegaard’s response ought to be the realization within his existence of the idea of the would-be Kierkegaard, a.k.a. the martyr. Yet, as we have seen, H.H. does not mandate that response from all readers of the text, to the contrary.

If such an interpretation of the essay is correct, one might read Kierkegaard as wanting to become a martyr in a more than just poetic way. Acutely aware of the gravity of his self-representation, he claims elsewhere that “[he does] have the right to present something like this,” by which he means the ideal Christian oriented toward martyrdom (WA: 234/SKS 22: 27, NB11: 33). Ultimately, Kierkegaard does not want to just hold on to this poetic possibility of himself; rather, he endeavors to existentially interpret it. While this pseudonymous work caused Kierkegaard to “nearly forget his own name,” which suggests his great investment into the poetical representation of martyrdom (WA: 237/SKS 22: 30, NB11: 40), he concludes that the problem it represents must “be discussed ... directly and in my own name, directly declaring: This is my life” WA: 235/SKS 22: 28, NB11:35). This tension between poetic and actual existence and the issue of translating a prescribed ideal of life into reality (which I have also identified through reading the essay from the

perspective of Girard's mimetic desire) seems to be more than just the key problem of this work; rather, it is *the* conundrum running through his authorship.⁴

3.2.2 *Figurations of Existence*

So far, I have demonstrated that the understanding of mimesis as a transformative and life-forming force is embedded in Kierkegaard's autobiographical and non-autobiographical texts. By applying the mimetic theories of Girard and Ricoeur to Kierkegaard's texts, I have brought to light certain implied dynamic mimetic structures in these works that contribute to the process of self-formation. This section demonstrates that the transformative dimension of mimesis is not just implied in Kierkegaard's authorship, but is indeed an integral part of his philosophy, especially his theory of selfhood, as well as his ethics. A close analysis of Kierkegaard's notions of redoubling and reduplication brings out their resemblance to Ricoeur's mimetic refiguration.

Reading Kierkegaard alongside Ricoeur, Schweiker notes that Kierkegaard's stages of existence disclose to readers modes of existence that form a matrix for distinct possibilities of human life (1990: 141). These descriptions of life outline a map that allows the reader to orient themselves in the matrix of life's possibilities. Stages of existence are presented from a point of view; often they are embodied by characters acting them out. Their performative presentation should prompt the reader to respond to the text by reflectively defining one's way of life against others and *choosing* a particular one for oneself.

Kierkegaard's pseudonymous *Either/Or 2* presents two contrasted life-views: the aesthetic and the ethical. Therein, the ethicist Judge William famously commands the character known as the Aesthete to "choose" himself. Among many differences that delineate the aesthetic life and the ethical life, Judge William describes the former as a *mélange* of various unstructured life episodes. Such a life has no history, no unity, and no continuity to it. In contrast, the ethical life is continuous; it has a beginning, is organized around a unifying idea or a goal, and has a *telos* (it goes somewhere for some reason). The ethical person is in charge of his own life, and he directs his life by operating between freedom and necessity, the two constituents of the self (EO2: 224/SKS 3: 238).

The ethical mode of life is contrasted with the religious in *Postscript*. Its pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus, explains the difference between both types of existence by referring to the categories of inwardness and qualitative difference, the intensification of subjectivity, human teleology, but also happiness and hiddenness. In contrast to the ethical person, the religious one not only has an ultimate passion for an idea (this structuring aspect characterizes a genuine life-view), but their passion is not dimmed by the inherently paradoxical nature of

religion (CUP1: 228–232/SKS 7: 207–212). Mindful of the facts that some other religions can provide individuals with a strong sense of life-purpose and that some people can have a very superficial understanding of Christianity as a religion, Climacus distinguishes between religiousness A and B (or paradoxical religiousness). Properly understood, Christianity is religiousness B, and it is characterized by demands that are so high that they cannot be justified and made sense of. To be a Christian is absurd; those to whom Christianity makes sense are not Christian at all (CUP1: 555–561/SKS 7: 505–510). Climacus’s descriptions of Christian existence are rather vague and general. He himself is not a Christian and cannot tell us more about it; the details of Christian existence are concealed behind the veil of the limits of logic and language.

Christian existence is also presented by Anti-Climacus, a Christian on steroids. Anti-Climacus does not simply offer a more robust account of Christianity—he presents it from a Christian perspective. Anti-Climacus is the author of *The Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity*. These books change the seemingly objective perspective of paradox to one that is more subjective and personal, iterated in the category of offense. In both works Anti-Climacus speaks to those who find the main tenets of Christianity offensive and those who do not. Distancing himself from his master and, as I will argue in Chapter 5, an important model of existence, Socrates, Kierkegaard insists on the category of sin as defining the human condition and the absolute separation between humans and God in Christianity.

Whether these accounts speak to and describe the contemporary man is a different subject—after all, Kierkegaard’s intended reader is a nineteenth-century middle-class white man, born, baptized, and raised in the Danish Lutheran Church. Yet, he is adamant that these three life-views with their more nuanced variations, painstakingly detailed by his pseudonyms, offer us the possibility to identify with them. This identification may occur on a more reflective level, where we can ponder how closely they resemble us and we them; or it may be operative on a more affective level, akin to the audience responding to a performance of a play with attunement and passion.

Figurations of existence are also present in Kierkegaard’s imaginary constructions. Instead of focusing on delineating stages of existence, or a particular stage for that matter, imaginary constructions are experiments that have a more individual character. The exploratory focus of the imaginary construction is both on the more abstract and universal elements constituting various projects of existence—what Kierkegaard terms the ideal—and on the individual elements that constitute probed characters. His fascination with how such imaginary construction creates a range of personalities receives an important incentive from Schleiermacher’s *Vertraute Briefe über Friedrich Schlegels “Lucinde”* (*Confidential Letters Concerning Friedrich Schlegel’s “Lucinde”*). As

Kierkegaard observes early on in his journals, Schleiermacher's review of Schlegel's *Lucinde*:

constructs a host of personalities out of the book itself and ... illuminates their individuality, so that instead of being faced by the reviewer with various points of view, we get instead many personalities who represent these various points of view. But they are complete beings, so that it is possible to get a glance into *the individuality of the single individual* and through numerous merely relatively true judgments to draw up our own final judgment.

(JP4: 3846/SKS 19: 99, Not 3: 2; *italics mine*)

This entry presents us with the complexity of imaginary characters that Kierkegaard sees in *Lucinde* and whom he will develop extensively in his authorship. He believes that such characters do have individuality and personality. While not existing in the customary ontological sense, these characters are not so alien to us. Commenting on the spiritual and psychological suffering of Quidam from "Guilty?/Not Guilty?" Kierkegaard indicates that the depiction of Quidam's agonies are so real that they "could have happened yesterday [because] the production is placed as close as possible to actuality" (BA: 16/SKS 15: 101)

As I argued in the previous chapter, Kierkegaard's imaginary construction examines "psychologically varied differences of the individualities" that come to light in his dynamic exposition that presents how individuals wrestle with issues of existence (CUP1: 625/SKS 7: 569). In that sense, imaginary construction is more than a form of communication between the author and the readers, which Kierkegaard calls "a doubly-reflected communication" (CUP1: 263/SKS 7: 239), but a textually constructed laboratory of existence. His grand imaginary project maps a development of the human self with respect to personality, character, and life-view by showing how fictitious persons respond to issues of existential magnitude. They disclose an advancement of the human self, represented in descriptions of the imaginary characters' wrestling with suffering, love, death, finitude, freedom, and time—but also with God, despair, and sin.

As already established, the overall goal of his authorship is the awakening to a more conscious and directed life, but also to living a particular individual life. Kierkegaard wants us to ask ourselves: Am I truly a self? Am I in charge of my life? Am I truly happy? Am I authentic? Am I a Christian? His assumption is that in many cases these incendiary questions will leave us somehow dissatisfied and will prompt us to better ourselves on these fronts. To achieve that, we need to recognize our deficiencies, identify ways to mitigate them, and, most importantly, act on these insights.

While throughout his works and in his journals, Kierkegaard often laments the human struggle in making up one's mind, he also points to the

unconscious and affective role of emotions, desires, and prototypes that motivate us to act. Although I will discuss these matters more closely in the chapters to follow, I would like to emphasize here the mimetic dimension of the process of engaging with the outlined models of human existence. My argument is that acting out what we find convincing, and what seduces us to act according to identified values, we find in Kierkegaard's categories of reduplication and redoubling. These notions correspond with Ricoeur's concept of refiguration (mimesis³).⁵

3.2.3 *Redoubling, Reduplication, Refiguration*

Kierkegaard engages the categories of redoubling and reduplication to portray the complexity of the becoming of the human ethical-religious existence. While it has been suggested that these concepts are distinct (cf. JP 3: 908–911, Hong's "Notes"), I read them as largely covering a similar array of problems for Kierkegaard and often overlapping in meaning. Yet, redoubling is used primarily by Kierkegaard to present the ontological dimension of the becoming of the ethical-religious individual, while reduplication explicates its ethical component. Both concepts are characterized by a specific mimetic "doubleness" or "twofoldness." A duplicate is already a copy of something else, and so to reduplicate a duplicate is an intensely imitative undertaking, which suggests that one is departing even further from its initial iteration or model. Similarly, redoubling suggests that a double, which is already an increase (a development or a reproduction of something), is doubled again, re-doubled, which means multiplied on a larger scale. The same is true of another of Kierkegaard's concepts, namely double-reflection: If we take reflection as a semblance of something else, double-reflection is a reflection of a reflection.

We first encounter redoubling in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous work *Repetition* [*Gjentagelse*] (R: 212, 221/SKS 4: 79, 88). The association of the eponymous main concept of this work with redoubling occurs in two of the "Letters from the Young Man." Redoubling there is interconnected with Job's blessing in receiving everything double except the life of his children (R: 221/SKS 4:88). The true repetition of the spirit is juxtaposed in contradiction with the repetition of worldly possessions (JP 3: 3687/SKS 24: 244, NB23:73). Thus, redoubling is associated with the former type of repetition. Another entry regarding redoubling and repetition appears in Johannes Climacus's *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est* (PF: 181/SKS 15: 58). In this context, repetition is presented as relating to both ideality and reality. The Young Man of the book cannot repeat because—as Constantin Constantius affirms—he is in ideality. He let the girl go some time ago, and now he is coming back and she is married. He engaged with her in the world of the ideal—the fantastic, the imaginative—but she is married in the realm of the real. The author himself visits

Berlin again, and he notices that he cannot discover that city again; it has already been discovered. In a similar manner, Job's children are dead; as we established in the previous chapter, Job can bring them back only by recollection.

These rather loose remarks on redoubling receive some kind of conceptual systematization in another work of Johannes Climacus, *Philosophical Fragments*. Therein the author places redoubling at the center of human becoming and historicity. Engaging redoubling in a dialectical way, he indicates that the becoming of a human being is characterized by a process of its intensification and growth in complexity. "Yet coming into existence can contain within itself a redoubling [*Fordobling*], that is, a possibility of coming into existence within its own coming into existence" (PF: 76/SKS 4: 276). For Climacus, the coming into existence of a human being is not simply a change in being that essentially treats the being before the change as different from what it is now. The before-the-change of human being in becoming should not be treated now (that is, after the change has taken place) as nonexistent. A being that is coming into existence is at the same time what it *is* and what it *was*. By this Climacus dialectically understands being's redoubling in itself. The historical dimension of human being is linked with the process of gaining individuality, and redoubling, and in this context, refers to the double movement of becoming an individual. On the one hand, the individual, due to its merely being born into the world, has its own historical point of beginning. On the other hand, "the more special historical coming into existence comes into existence by way of a relatively freely acting cause, which in turn definitively points to an absolutely freely acting cause" (PF: 76/SKS 4: 276), which is the realm of spirit and the eternal.

Postscript adds further nuance to the notion of redoubling by taking it beyond its function of being primarily a dialectical qualification of being. Contrasting "abstract sense of redoubling" with one that pertains to "existing spirit qua existing spirit ... [that] is conscious of being an existing individual human being," Climacus indicates that true existence is not in the self-identification of truth and being or their convertibility. Apparently criticizing the idealist take on the scholastic discussion of *ens et verum convertuntur* (Peperzak 2001: 169), Climacus maintains that identity (or approximation) and convertibility of being and truth do not apply to humans, as they are not static beings but beings in the process of becoming. True redoubling, as is further explained in other writings, is a process of fortified redoubling. In *Christian Discourses*, for instance, Kierkegaard remarks on this point by referring to a difference between a man and a bird. For Kierkegaard, human beings are more complex than animals such as birds because, while their nature is predetermined (they cannot deviate from being what they are), thanks to their consciousness humans can become Christians. In redoubling, a man has two beginnings: one is in his historical existence; the other

arises in the chance of becoming in the eternal way—to be itself before God (CD: 41/SKS 10: 52).

Climacus's remarks about redoubling in *Postscript* are important, as they link the concept with reduplication. Therein, he relates abstract redoubling—which here is an abstract aspect of the truth comprehended in an idealistic manner—with reduplication, saying: “When for existing spirit *qua* existing spirit there is a question about truth, that abstract reduplication [*Reduplikation*] of truth recurs” (CUP1: 191–192/SKS 7: 176). Genuinely desired reduplication is the reduplication of a subject's thinking in its existence where the inward is mimetically expressed in the outward. In the example of the relation between a teacher and a learner, Climacus associates reduplication with the inward movement within an individual who wants to grasp the truth (CUP1: 333/SKS 7: 304).

This transition from the inward to the outward in redoubling matures and acquires visible mimetic colors, as well as an ethical flavor in *Works of Love*. Kierkegaard introduces redoubling to explain his non-preferential love as a spiritual category. To love without preferential scope is to love the other as one's neighbor, for “the concept ‘neighbor’ is actually the redoubling [*Fordobtelsen*] of your own self” (WL: 21/SKS 9: 29). Redoubling signifies here a change within the individual's self, according to which the individual renounces loving preferentially those who are close to him (family, loved ones, friends, etc.) on account of loving others as oneself. On the one hand, the redoubling qualification of love allows it to avoid the fate of objectification, because redoubling is a spiritual category. On the other hand, in the light of redoubling, loving the other has a mimetic and normative dimension; the other becomes a redoubled self to whom one has a duty. To love oneself is to love the other (WL: 182/SKS 9: 182). Moreover, non-preferential love encompasses the pair duality-unity and calls for a “refiguring” action, because redoubling effectively ties the outward and the inward of the existential in an individual; this link is contained in one's expressing outwardly what they held as true in inwardness (Cf. WA: 99/SKS 11: 103). “The one who loves is or becomes what he does,” states Kierkegaard in *Works of Love* (WL: 281/SKS 9: 279). In other words, in love the one loving expresses that he is in love. The love of the neighbor is fulfilled in action. The ideality of love is “repeated” and becomes embodied reality.

Reduplication generally emphasizes the ethical dimension of the dialectical qualification of the human being-becoming. In 1848, Kierkegaard complains in his journal, “I really do not know one single religious author (except perhaps Augustine) who actually reduplicates his thought” (JP 3: 3667/SKS 20: 418, NB5: 117). This criticism, which is initially directed toward ordinary churchgoers of the state church, is followed by another scornful remark on a clergyman who, preaching about the cost of discipleship, “is a rogue who flatters his vanity by imagining himself persecuted out here in rural peace and security” (JP

3: 3668/SKS 21: 16, NB6: 13). Reduplication is normatively charged. At its core lies simultaneously a disapproval of a certain kind of duality in life and a call to a kind of unity. The unity of the life and the “preaching” of Augustine is here juxtaposed with the lack of it in the lives of the clergy and the churchgoer, both entertaining the imagination rather than real existence. For Kierkegaard, Augustine walks the walk; he does as he preaches. The churchgoer and the clergyman are dishonest, and their life lacks integrity. They know the requirements of Christianity (especially the clergyman who preaches it), yet they are content with the fact that they either cannot or do not conform to such requirements.

This example shows reduplication as being concerned primarily with the ethical sphere. Yet, another passage discloses the ethical dimension of reduplication bonded with ontology. Drawing on how Christ demonstrated to his disciples the real threat of turning Christianity into a political party or a social movement, Kierkegaard refers to “reduplication in existing and action” that characterized Christ’s mode of communication (JP 3: 3672/SKS 21: 185, NB8: 99; *translation slightly modified*). “Christ had stood the test and remained true to himself” by ontologically confirming the significance of the difference between the spiritual kingdom and the earthly kingdom in his death (JP 3: 3672/SKS 21: 185, NB8: 99). Elsewhere, Kierkegaard reiterates a similar point on the unity of ethics and being with regard to authentic Christian existence:

No, Christ has not appointed assistant-professors—but imitators or followers. When Christianity (precisely because it is not a doctrine) does not reduplicate itself in the one who presents it, he does not present Christianity; for Christianity is an existential-communication and can only be presented—by existing. Basically, to exist therein, to express it in one’s existence etc.—this is what it means to reduplicate. (JP1: 484/SKS 21: 41, NB6: 56)

Embodying existence as the expression of reduplication and redoubling is treated by Anti-Climacus in *Practice in Christianity*, in the context of indirect communication. The “communicator is the reduplication [*Reduplikationen*] of the communication” and therefore is present as subject in the communication (PC: 133/SKS 12: 137). When the communicator is absent from the communication as a subject—the “communicator is a zero, a nonperson, an objective something” (PC: 133/SKS 12: 137)—the redoubling of communication is present in the unity of opposites: Communication is of the subjective, but the communicator stays as a simply disinterested medium of communication (PV: 263/Pap. X-5 B 234). While most of Kierkegaard’s remarks on reduplication appear in the context of authentic Christianity or authentic Christian existence, the demand to reduplicate is also inherently present in genuine ethical existence more broadly. As I have argued elsewhere, just as being an authentic

Christian means daily resembling Christ by putting on Christ in an act of inward appropriation that results in concrete acts of “re-present[ing] him” (JP 2: 1858/SKS 22: 39, NB14: 80), so being an ethically good person means “putting on duty [as] the expression of [one’s] innermost being” (EO2: 254/SKS 3: 243; cf. Kaftanski 2020: 557–577).

In that sense, both being a true Christian and being a morally good person require two imitative steps that form reduplication. The first step is to mimetically internalize the valued and desired content. The second step is to mimetically externalize it in one’s concrete existence. The idea here is, again, that acting on our beliefs (ethics) changes our being (ontology) by becoming a part of it. This corresponds with Ricoeur’s mimesis of figuration that eventuates “metamorphosis of the ego” (1991: 88). Using Ricoeur’s vocabulary, our interpretation and understanding of a text (ethical or religious) changes the self and leads to the enlarged self.

Redoubling and reduplication expose the qualitative difference between an individual’s thought and their action. Truly existing means redoubling truth in one’s existence; being truth by being in truth. To love someone means to love them as our redoubled self. Direct communication of martyrdom means committing oneself to martyrdom and becoming one. Thus, Kierkegaard’s prefiguration of mimetically charged types of existence, or his configuration of his own self (selves) in autobiographical and non-autobiographical narratives, is designed for existential redoubling and reduplication, which I understand along the lines of Ricoeur’s finalizing act on the mimetic arc, namely refiguration.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Kierkegaard’s remarks from 1850 on the surprising role of Bishop Mynster in his late production (JP 6: 6693/SKS 24: 74, NB21: 122). “Now if I had envisioned this completely from the beginning and there had been no Mynster, then first of all I would have had to create someone to represent the established order and firmly bolster him up. But since I did not understand my task that clearly in the beginning, I very well could have failed to notice this and the whole thing would have turned out differently, perhaps gone wrong. ... This is how I found my proper position.”
- 2 Cf. Martin Buber’s (1990: xvi) invocation to the “readers for whom [he] hope[s],” namely those who will read the account of his life and production as a certain “way as one” in the “Foreword” to his collection of essays *Pointing the Way*.
- 3 Boven (2015: 159–165) reads *psychologiske Experiment* as an alternative to the “two trajectories in modern literature: poetry (e.g. Shakespeare) and speculative drama (e.g. J. L. Heiberg).” All three “deal with existential passions which are made visible by creating a contradiction between the ideality and the actuality of a character,” maintains Boven indicating the superiority of *psychologisk Experiment* in positing the religious as “a new kind of absolute passion.”
- 4 This idea seems to be reinforced by Kierkegaard’s consideration of that essay as the key (*Nøglen*) to the production as a whole. Cf. JP 6: 6447/SKS 22: 152, NB12: 12.

- 5 The claim that Kierkegaard's reduplication corresponds with Ricoeur's refiguration is also made by Garff (2015). In contrast to Garff, who sees prefiguration and configuration as corresponding to the aesthetic and the ethical stages of existence respectively, and in consequence, the religious mode corresponding to Ricoeur's refiguration, I see refiguration as being potentially operative in all stages of existence.

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4 Imitation

Imitation is among the most fundamental concepts of mimesis. It is also the most prominent mimetic notion in Kierkegaard's authorship. Rarely explicitly considered in relation to mimesis in the literature, imitation is by far the most discussed facet of mimesis by Kierkegaard scholars. The word is historically and customarily related to his discussion of the imitation of Christ,¹ which subsequently serves as the intended environment for its consideration. Imitation in Kierkegaard is usually rendered conceptually through the Danish word *Efterfølgelse*. Scholars have argued that *Efterfølgelse* is a unique word that should be analyzed principally in religious-theological contexts. Kierkegaard's interest in imitation is to be understood as auxiliary to his larger project of convincing us that to be a genuine Christian one must imitate Christ, who is the prototype of authentic (Christian) existence.

This chapter challenges a number of these readings of imitation in Kierkegaard. Section 4.1, "*Imitatio Christi*," opens with a brief overview of the current scholarship on imitation in Kierkegaard. Wrestling with several interrelated issues, the contemporary literature on the subject minimizes if not ignores references to mimesis and focuses on reading imitation in the context of the *imitatio Christi* tradition. By doing so, commentators overlook a number of important conceptualizations of imitation that are crucial to a more holistic understanding of *Efterfølgelse*, and in consequence, to a better understanding of imitation and mimesis in Kierkegaard.

To mitigate that shortcoming, I trace Kierkegaard's development of *Eftergjøre*—the main mimetic term used in his so-called first authorship—to a set of opposing concepts *Efterfølgelse* and *Efterabelse*, prominently featured in his second authorship. I also briefly explore *Efterligne* to show the further complexity behind Kierkegaard's imitation. By reading imitation in Kierkegaard in relation to two types of imitation in Plato and four types of imitation in Kant, I show that Kierkegaard's interests in imitation are deeply philosophical; hence they go beyond their religious-theological

scope. The chapter ends with a hint at a novel conceptualization of imitation in Kierkegaard, namely indirect imitation, that sheds new light on his take on the imitation of Christ, disclosing his rather ambivalent relation to it. It also points toward its secular dimension, which is effectively argued for in Chapters 5 and 7.

4.1 *Imitatio Christi*

Kierkegaard's dialogue with the *imitatio Christi* tradition excites philosophers, theologians, and religious studies scholars alike. It is the main paradigm within which scholars analyze imitation in Kierkegaard. No wonder, since Kierkegaard dedicates significant parts of his writings, both published under his name and pseudonymous, but also his journals, to the subject of the imitation of Christ. It does not surprise either that the subject in question is read from a religious "perspective" or specifically in relation to Christian theological themes. Indeed, Kierkegaard discusses the phenomenon of the imitation of Christ predominantly in those of his writings that focus on theological motifs, and, as he often reiterates, his writings aim at redefining Christianity after all. Thus, scholars read Kierkegaard's discussion of *imitatio Christi* often as a part of a historical appraisal of the imitation of Christ drawing on religious or theological literature. Others identify new subjects brought up by Kierkegaard that, in a sense, broaden our current understanding of this theme in theological and religious studies. Kierkegaard's contribution to the discussion on the imitation of Christ is positive and negative. One example of the former pertains to the attention paid to the role of contemporaneity with Christ in the imitation of Christ. Negative considerations, less frequent, struggle to identify the object at work in this Christian phenomenon or simply point out its limitations with regard to its secular relevance.

The contemporary reception of imitation in Kierkegaard is dominated by historical, religious, and philosophical readings that consider the imitation of Christ as the principal point of departure for respective investigations. While these readings treat various of Kierkegaard's texts as the main source of research and ask such different questions as to what constitute the key inspirations in Kierkegaard's account of imitation, or what in Christ can and cannot be imitated, or whether imitation can be freely willed, they all approach imitation as a subject implicitly linked with the imitation of Christ. These assorted ways of reading imitation in Kierkegaard reflect a general scholarly attitude toward the subject of the imitation of Christ in Kierkegaard's writings, which by extension is also true of the overall, meager, reception of mimesis in his authorship. In consequence, as I demonstrate in this chapter, it has been customary in the literature to either ignore mimesis as an important vantage point on imitation in Kierkegaard or, as may seem surprising, paradoxically reducing, or equating mimesis with imitation.

This lack of recognition of the originary conceptual environment of mimesis as informing imitation, and hence subsequently informing the discussion on the imitation of Christ, largely obscures Kierkegaard's contribution in each of these respective, though interrelated, subjects. This is the case for three reasons. First, an analysis of imitation (understood broadly) and the imitation of Christ (understood narrowly) in his writings in relation to mimesis offers us a better understanding of these subjects in Kierkegaard's writings. Second, these analyses advance our understanding of mimesis. As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe reveals in his *Typography*, mimesis "never is on its 'own'" but always manifests itself as already at work in various phenomena (1989: 117). Imitation and the imitation of Christ in Kierkegaard need to be understood in the same way; they are phenomena that disclose to us mimesis in discrete manners and configurations. Lacoue-Labarthe's insistence on never defining mimesis is greatly aligned with Kierkegaard, who, while "defining" a number of concepts across his authorship, never does so with mimesis. Focusing on Kierkegaard's contribution to the mimesis discourse, I consider his turbulent engagement with both imitation and the imitation of Christ as essentially manifestations of mimesis that disclose mimesis. Third, apprehending imitation in Kierkegaard solely through the lens of *Efterfølgelse* of the imitation of Christ, hence divorced from mimesis more broadly, obscures the fact that Kierkegaard passionately engaged such words as *Eftergjøre*, *Efterligne*, *Lighed*, *Ligne*, *Efterbelse*, and others, to denote imitation. Understanding of the meanings Kierkegaard attributes to these important mimetic concepts offers a better overall comprehension of the role of imitation in his ethics, moral psychology, and crowd psychology discussed in the following chapters of this book.

Elsewhere, I have identified three categories of approaches to mimesis in Kierkegaard in the relevant literature, namely: Kierkegaard's writings, Kierkegaard's library, and the contemporary debate (Kaftanski 2019: 191–202). While every such categorization is inescapably prone to simplifications and unfortunate reductions, I briefly reference it to lay out the problematic nature of the current debate on imitation and mimesis in Kierkegaard. These three approaches are distinct with respect to the source material considered and the overall guiding agendas characterizing their investigations. Nevertheless, it seems that most of them read imitation in Kierkegaard as a single, coherent, and "continuous" notion.

Kierkegaard's writings, the first approach to the subject, pertains to thinkers who read Kierkegaard's literary production as homogeneous and largely philosophically and theologically-religiously coherent. Such a reading assumes that Kierkegaard's overall authorship was planned and executed as that. Consequently, it is assumed that his thought goes through controlled "changes" that are not radical, but consistent with the whole project. The second category, *Kierkegaard's library*, characterizes a broader approach to imitation in Kierkegaard that reaches beyond his

oeuvre and considers the body of works found in his personal library. Apart from relying on his own remarks about the subject in question, these scholars identify various influences from philosophical and religious literature on Kierkegaard's usages of imitation and, more specifically, the imitation of Christ. Imitation in Kierkegaard is perceived primarily as a response to or a development of the religious *imitatio Christi* tradition.

The last category of approaches to mimesis pertains to thinkers who read it in relation to three types of resources: Kierkegaard's oeuvre, the texts of Kierkegaard's contemporaries, and the current philosophical debates. These scholars engage imitation in Kierkegaard to probe its applicability to discussions in both the analytic and continental traditions of philosophy on human selfhood, morality, and agency.

Either seeking essential insights about imitation in the imitation of Christ, or openly reducing the former to the latter, or often equating mimesis with imitation, scholars subscribing to one or more of the three identified approaches have wrestled with a number of canonical issues with relation to imitation in Kierkegaard. These issues continue to shape discussions on imitation and the imitation of Christ in Kierkegaard today; they can be grouped under five interrelated and largely overlapping theological-philosophical problems: (a) the demandingness of the imitation of Christ; (b) the object at stake in the imitation; (c) the nature of imitation; (d) the relationship between grace and one's efforts in being and becoming a genuine Christian; and (e) the requirements of self-denial, suffering, and spiritual training.

The demandingness of imitation and the object of imitation. There is no consensus in the literature with respect to the questions (a) whether the imitation of Christ is demanded from all Christians, and only Christians, and (b) what the object in the imitation of Christ is. Marie Mikulova Thulstrup's classic "Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Imitation" argues that the demand to imitate Christ pertains to all people ("the demand applies to all men"), but sees it fit only to "a Christian to an extraordinary degree" (Thulstrup 1962: 268). Although it is hard to ascertain whether by "all men" she means non-Christians, it seems that she is rather skeptical that Christ is the Pattern for everyone, as that would invite superficial imitation. Regarding the object of imitation in the imitation of Christ, Thulstrup distinguishes Christ as the Pattern and Christ as the Redeemer and argues that only the former must be imitated. M. Jamie Ferreira (2001) appraises imitation in Kierkegaard primarily as ethical regulation. Imitation boils down to concrete acts in Kierkegaard. Addressing the relation between the Pattern and Redeemer, she states that "we are called on to ... follow the example [Christ] set in his human nature. Kierkegaard sees Christ as the prototype in meeting earthly needs" (Ferreira 2001: 82). In stark contrast to Thulstrup, the demand to imitate Christ is universal in Ferreira. Largely following in her footsteps, Patrick Stokes (2010a) reads the demand of imitation in relation to the

normative vision of selfhood. Imitation is not just a religious phenomenon reserved to genuine Christians but part of Kierkegaard's vision of the becoming of the self that requires formation of images of a future self and incorporating them through imitation into one's actual self. The demandingness of imitation pertains to the requirement of recognizing the projected vision as the object of imitation essential to the self. Inability or failure to recognize the demand of the image is attributed to the failed imitator, who does not wish to be personally involved with it. In contrast, the true imitator resembles and, hence, becomes what she admires. Sylvia Walsh (1994, 2009) appraises imitation in Kierkegaard in relation to Christ the prototype. While she references Kierkegaard's remarks on the demand of imitation (2009: 158), it is hard to find a definitive account of the demandingness with respect to Christians and non-Christians in her work. Regarding the object of imitation, Walsh indicates that Christ's life "has fully expressed the ideal" of human selfhood (1994: 236). This rather philosophical take on the problem is inspired by the works of Kant and Schleiermacher, where Christ is understood as either a human universal or God-consciousness actualized in human perfection, respectively. In that vein, Christ is appraised as the prototype for human existence in a more general sense, not as a direct prototype for individual human perfection. Yet, a clear delineation of what in Christ can and must be imitated is missing from Walsh's account, which becomes problematic in her further elaboration of the nature of imitation. The object of imitation in the imitation of Christ is raised in light of various types of moralism. Scholars such as Rob Compaijen (2011) and John Lippit (2000), pondering the value of Christ's exemplarism to a secular reader, disagree on whether the qualities of moral exemplarism Kierkegaard attributes to Christ can be understood more broadly and sought in other exemplars. In contrast to the position held by Lippit, Compaijen argues that the imitation of Christ is being reduced substantially while translated for a secular audience.

The nature of imitation. The imitation of Christ requires what Walsh calls "the dialectic of inversion," which is based on the idea expressed in Kierkegaard's journals that "the essentially Christian is always the positive which is recognizable by the negative" (JP 4: 4680/SKS 24, 457–458, NB25: 32). This comes back to the question of the object of imitation in the imitation of Christ. If "the dialectic of inversion," where our likeness to Christ means in fact our unlikeness and vice versa, the unlikeness of non-Christian seems problematic to the Christian nature of the imitation of Christ as such. Bradley R. Dewey (1968) offers an analysis of both imitation and the imitator in relation to the imitation of Christ. For Dewey, genuine Christian life is "the life of imitation" that integrates the two dimensions of imitation in Kierkegaard: religious and ethical. The imitating self of the single individual must struggle with the simultaneous offensiveness and attraction of Christ. Dewey sets imitation in

Kierkegaard in contrast with two mistaken types of imitation: slavish and facsimile. On the one hand, genuine imitation defies “slavish adherence to one set pattern” (Dewey 1968: 107) and guards against a facsimile imitation by securing a qualitative difference between Christ and the single individual. On the other, it disagrees with the idea of the imitating self as being “propertyless,” a misreading of the ideal self he attributes to ascetic imitation cultivated in the Middle Ages. Moreover, Dewey finds the phrase “the imitation of Christ” misleading, and he intentionally chooses “following Christ” by focusing on the etymology of *Efterfølgelse*. For Stokes, the imitation of Christ requires from us what Kierkegaard calls contemporaneity, which is “an *immediately self-reflexive* mode of vision, i.e. one in which we apprehend *our relation* to what is imagined *within* the imaginative experience” (2010b: 314). Being contemporary with Christ is a psychological phenomenon that must be re-created, brought back by an individual in imagination from the historical past. This view is being challenged by Joshua Cockayne (2017), who understands the link between contemporaneity and imitation as requiring a belief in Christ being a living person who is supernaturally present to his believers. William Schweiker reads imitation in Kierkegaard in relation to the Bible and Paul Ricoeur’s concept of “figuration.” Turning to the Bible, Schweiker goes beyond the *imitatio Christi* of the New Testament to the *imago Dei* of the Old Testament. He notices that, on the one hand, the self has a mimetic task of the imitation of Christ; on the other, the *imago Dei* means that the human self is already in an imitative relationship to the Ideal. Following Ricoeur, to imitate Christ means for Schweiker to be related to other human beings and to God in an authentic way (1990: 171). This requires generating new meanings through interpretation rather than delineating the relation between original and copy in imitation.

Grace, will, suffering. While Thulstrup perceives the imitation of Christ as requiring literal dying to the world and martyrdom, and Ferreira finds seeking suffering in imitation morally wrong and to be avoided (Ferreira 2001: 237), Dewey and Walsh position themselves somehow in the middle of that debate. Dewey sees suffering as potentially occurring in the life of the true Christian, but he stipulates that “one is not commanded *per se* to suffer” (1968: 145). Walsh attempts a systematic presentation of several types of suffering in relation to the imitation of Christ: non-Christian and Christian, innocent and guilty, Christ-like and human-like. These distinctions reinforce the conclusion that Christ is not an all-round pattern for imitation, as his experience of suffering is different from ours and vice versa (Walsh 1994: 134), an idea that stands in contrast with Walsh’s initial views of the prototype. Walsh emphasizes that the imitation of Christ is in fact unattainable for humans unless constantly aided by grace. This view is similar to that of Barnett (2011), who, while stating the importance of the human will in relation to the imitation of Christ,

indicates that human will suffers from imperfection and thus needs to be aided by Christ's grace.

Of these five main problems that arise from studying imitation in Kierkegaard's authorship, I presently focus on the third one, namely the nature of imitation. I examine the distinctiveness and interrelations of four words used by Kierkegaard to denote various types of imitation, namely *Eftergjøre*, *Efterligne*, *Lighed*, and *Ligne*. In doing so, I unveil Kierkegaard's aspirations for a type of imitation that, on the one hand, is resistant to the debilitating human propensity to primal and deindividuating dispositions and behaviors, and on the other, responds to a higher need of genuine existence. By tracing the development and increased conceptual refinement of his conceptualization of various aspects of imitation, we get a more holistic picture of his interest in and contribution to the discussion of mimesis in relation to human existence. In this systematic take on imitation, Kierkegaard appears as an invested thinker engaging mimesis to better understand human nature and the complexity of human interactions in relation to such philosophical themes as moral emotions, moral development, and moral motivations. The present investigation serves as the foundation for the following chapters that deal with the subjects of religious prototypes, emotional contagion, and authentic existence.

4.2 *Eftergjøre and Efterligne*

4.2.1 *Eftergjøre*

Kierkegaard's interest in imitation increases substantially in his so-called second authorship. In that period, which stretches from 1848 to his premature death in 1855, Kierkegaard considers imitation in relation to the Christian requirement of following Christ through martyrdom. This radical form of Christianity is argued most notably in his pseudonymous *Practice in Christianity* from 1850, but also in *For Self-Examination* and *Judge for Yourself!* from 1851, both published under his name. The idea of the imitation of Christ, the perfect model of human (Christian) existence, is expressed principally in the Danish word *Efterfølgelse*. Yet since this word enters the picture fairly late in his works, it is important to study other mimetic words that denote the human capacity to imitate. One such word is *Eftergjøre*. It literally translates into "doing after" and has both conceptual and concrete dimensions. *Eftergjøre* is not systematically discussed by Kierkegaard, and it is not as frequently used as *Efterfølgelse* in his works. A brief analysis of *Eftergjøre* offers a rich perspective on his (religious) psychology and an important insight into *Efterfølgelse*.

Eftergjøre is used by Constantin Constantius in his concluding letter to the "Dear Reader" from *Repetition*. Indicating that the book may find a few enthusiasts, as it is a disappointing model for matchmaking

arrangements and possibly a questionable distraction to young people from their duty of searching for a spouse, Constantin Constantius states that the value of the book is in its treatment of the dialectic of the universal and the particular. More specifically, the book is about the dialectical movement of existence that occurs in the dialectic between the two. Suggesting that it may be “difficult to understand the movement in the book,” Constantin Constantius advises that the book “demands speed in imitating the movements [*at eftergjøre Bevægelser*]” of the dialectics of the universal and the particular (R: 226/SKS 4: 92). That is to say, as it is posited throughout the book, the dialectic of existence cannot be speculatively explained. To find out whether repetition “works,” as it were, one has to “imitate” the book within one’s life; put differently, one has to existentially repeat the movements of the book. This early intimation of the existential engagement with text discussed in the previous chapter shows that Kierkegaard was interested in the narrative formation of the self quite early on in his authorship. Insistence on the promptness of imitation set against speculative deliberation will also resurface in the context of Kierkegaard’s juxtaposition of imitation with admiration discussed in Chapter 6.

Another important usage of *eftergjøre* crops up in the context of Kierkegaard’s psychological project. For instance, in the pseudonymously written “Silhouettes” from *Either/Or*, the word is employed to suggest that one can learn through observation how others think. Psychologically dissecting how Donna Elvira from Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* copes with being abandoned by the notorious Don Giovanni, the author of “Silhouettes” states:

A woman’s dialectic is remarkable, and only the person who has the opportunity to observe it, can imitate it [*kun han kan eftergjøre den*], whereas the greatest dialectician who ever lived could speculate himself crazy trying to produce it [*frembringe den*].

(EO1: 199/SKS 2: 195)

One way to look at this passage would be to read it as disclosing Kierkegaard’s questionable remarks on the peculiarity of women’s thinking that escapes even the most skillful of thinkers. Such a reading seems problematic, though, as Kierkegaard adds that he indeed “had a complete course in dialectics” through his encounters with women that exemplified Elvira’s dilemma. Rather, this passage shows that, on the one hand, what cannot be attained by speculative reason is accessible through observation and imitation. Had he not paid attention to Elvira’s troubles, he would miss an important element from the real world that escapes the wisest of men. On the other hand, Kierkegaard suggests here that such refined objects as one’s way of reasoning, but also moods and predispositions as he adds later on, can be imitated.

The passage quoted from “Silhouettes” suggests that one’s way of reasoning could be potentially replicated in the observer, which he phrases as “produce it.” The author of “Silhouettes” does not elaborate that idea, but it resurfaces in *The Concept of Anxiety*, which develops the psychological-observational dimension of *eftergjøre*. *The Concept of Anxiety* is intriguingly subtitled *A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*. The overall goal of this book is to argue that anxiety is more than a peculiar human experience, itself so common to a modern subject; it is a hallmark of the human condition, and it has a theological/dogmatic dimension. While anxiety can be approached from various perspectives—it is a dialectical concept that has many facets—it can be properly scrutinized by a unique type of doctor, a physician of the soul, the psychologist. To understand the human condition marked by anxiety, the psychologist must be able to, first, empathize with other existing people, and second, “construct his example which even though it lacks factual authority nevertheless has an authority of a different kind” (CA: 54/SKS 4: 359). The former capacity is supported by sympathy, which is understood not as a sudden overwhelming feeling of pity toward someone, but rather as a predisposition and a capacity that allows one to tell what another human being is going through.

While the link between sympathy, empathy, and imitation is extensively treated in the penultimate chapter of this book, it is important to observe here that Kierkegaard’s employment of sympathy overlaps significantly with the conceptualizations of this notion in David Hume and Adam Smith. For these thinkers, to sympathize with someone means to reflectively acknowledge that one is like others in terms of one’s desires, faculty of judgment, sense of humor, or inclinations. Sympathy is also a matter of nonconceptual attunement with the emotions of other people.

Vigilius Haufniensis’s rendering of sympathy encompasses these cognitive and noncognitive aspects. On the one hand, sympathy is affective in the sense of the unconscious and collective way in which sympathy is operative (“being sympathetic ... is the most paltry of all social virtuosities and aptitudes”; CA: 120/SKS 4: 422). A special case in that regard is sympathizing with a suffering person. We may sympathize with a sufferer to understand their suffering, but we may also be overwhelmed in that process by someone’s suffering to the extent that our individuality becomes indistinguishable from theirs. On the other hand, aided by reflection and imagination, our sympathy can grasp the suffering of others and analyze it without the need to focus on the actual sufferer. Sympathy is then part of the imagery construction in *The Concept of Anxiety*; hence, the psychologist can resort to his imagination in his observational role as a physician. For Vigilius Haufniensis, genuine sympathy requires one’s attitude toward a sufferer that admits that a condition that the psychologist observes in another, whether pathological or sound, is replicable in themselves. Vigilius Haufniensis indicates: “One must have sympathy.

However, this sympathy is true only when one admits rightly and profoundly to oneself that what has happened to one human being can happen to all” (CA: 54/SKS 4: 359).

In both cases, psychological investigation requires the capacity of imitation on the side of the physician. The psychologist needs this capacity to bring about various psychological states in himself by imitating them from the observed patient and bringing them about at will to further scrutinize them.

The psychological observer ought to be more nimble than a tightrope dancer in order to incline and bend himself to other people and imitate their attitudes [*eftergjøre deres Stillinger*], and his silence in the moment of confidence should be seductive and voluptuous, so that what is hidden may find satisfaction in slipping out to chat with itself in the artificially constructed nonobservance and silence.

(CA: 54–55/SKS 4: 359)

This type of imitation is not a form of mimicry, which is among the lower types of imitation predominantly focused on one-to-one replication of the observed action. Here, the psychologist is someone who is able to imitate people’s attitudes. To achieve that, the psychologist must possess the skill that allows him “to incline and bend himself to other people”; or, as an alternative translation provided by Walter Lowrie states, “to insinuate himself under the skin of other people” (CDL: 49). This anti-Platonic manner of work of the psychologist, which demands becoming someone else and speaking in an assumed voice to lure the patient into divulging their innermost (troubling and crippling) secrets, aims at assisting the patient in their struggle. The medic must absorb the pathological burden with which the sufferer struggles and, after enlarging it out of proportion, confront the sufferer with such a hyperbolic representation of their issue. The patient’s recognition of and identification with the pathological issue at stake mirrored in the person of a psychologist will bring them “an indescribable relief and satisfaction.” To succeed in this, the psychologist must exhibit a great deal of diligence and restraint so as to “control his observations.” Haufniensis states:

To that end he imitates in himself [*eftergjør til den Ende*] every mood, every psychic state that he discovers in another. Thereupon he sees whether he can delude the other by the imitation [*kan skuffe den Anden ved Eftergjørelsen*] and carry him along into the subsequent development, which is his own creation by virtue of the idea.

(CA: 55/SKS 4: 360)

This part of the action is clearly oriented toward the good of the patient. The mirroring and recognition have a clearly affective dimension.

Haufniensis's point is that when we confront a magnified version of our problem in others, we can then recognize them as being problematic; hence, recognition does not have a straightforward cognitive dimension that would allow the patient to understand their problem when expressed theoretically. Conceptual clarification builds resistance to truth in patients; that is why the psychologist must have recourse to, as one would assume, the morally dubious means of mastered beguilement and shrewdness.

The publication of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in 1846 manifests Kierkegaard's growing ambiguity around *eftergjøre*. The difficulty with its definitive valuation, which often depends on the context in which the word is used, is augmented by Climacus's ubiquitous ironic tone. The book starts out with the thought that it could have been written by "every young graduate in theology ... provided he is capable of imitating the intrepid dialectical positions and movements [*eftergjøre de dialektiske, uforfærdede Stillinger og Bevægelser*]," presumably occurring in the book (CUP1: 11/SKS 7:20). It seems that a positive evaluation of the imitation of positions, or attitudes, and movements in this opening fragment is consistent with *eftergjøre* from *Either/Or*, *Repetition*, and *The Concept of Anxiety*. A slightly different valuation of *eftergjøre* is at work in another fragment from the book that compares contemplating imitating existence and actual existence. Climacus says:

The infinite and the finite are joined together in existing and in the existing person, who does not need to bother with creating existence, or with thinking about reproducing existence [*at skabe Existents eller med at tænke at eftergjøre Existents*], but all the more with existing.
(CUP1: 420/SKS 7: 382)

From the context of the passage, which attacks the Hegelian category of mediation as abstracted from actual existence, and "mistaken reflection" as essentially avoiding existence, what is pejoratively appraised here is not "*eftergjøre Existents*" as such but the reflective part that does not allow for existence to be imitated, hence existentially reproduced. The idea of reproducing existence, how the Hongs rendered "*eftergjøre Existents*," while undeveloped by Climacus, signals Kierkegaard's ideas of existential redoubling and reduplication discussed in the previous chapter.

Climacus does not shy away from using *eftergjøre* in negative contexts. He engages it to denote pretense and pretending, but also the fact that something is counterfeited or does not live up to standards. Pretense and pretending are operative in a passage in which *eftergjøre* denotes an activity of only simulating an attack to deceive an enemy instead of actually preparing the assault (CUP1: 465/SKS 7: 422). A different example shows how *eftergjøre* is used in conjunction with *skuffe*, which means "deceive" but also "disappoint," to indicate a life that is not truly lived.

Describing a man whose life is lived according to “custom and tradition in the city where he lives” (CUP1: 244/SKS 7: 222), who behaves like others do, Climacus suggests that such a man does not live a life of integrity. Such a life is based on the imitation of the superficial tenets of a so-called happy and complete life.

Yet no one would hesitate to consider him an actual human being (for the absence of inwardness is not seen directly), although he would be more like a puppet character that very deceptively imitates [*der meget skuffende eftergjorde*] all the human externalities—would even have children with his wife.

(CUP1: 244–245/SKS 7: 222)

The bigger picture in which this quotation appears suggests that the truly deceived is the actual man, not so much other people who are deceived only in the secondary sense. He is worse off, because his deception rids himself of that which truly matters, the relationship with God.

The shift in Kierkegaard’s valuation of *eftergjøre* across a fairly short period of roughly two years is puzzling. As I have indicated earlier, Haufniensis uses *eftergjøre* in conjunction with *skuffe* in *The Concept of Anxiety* to praise the skills of the religious psychologist who is able to “seduce” and “bend himself” to excel in imitating others. Intriguingly, Climacus engages the two words to disparage a similar set of imitative skills of seduction and deception that eventually renders life inauthentic and incomplete.

4.2.2 *Efterligne*, *Lighed* and *Ligne*

In contrast to *Eftergjøre*, which features quite frequently in Kierkegaard’s first authorship and substantially less so in his second authorship, *Efterligne* and *Lighed* appear rather evenly throughout most of his authorship. *Eftergjøre* refers primarily to a sophisticated human capacity for imitation that has mostly secular application, hence it is limited to the sphere of immanence; at times, this word appears in negative contexts. In comparison, Kierkegaard repeatedly uses *Efterligne* and *Lighed* to reinforce his assertions about the requirement of the imitation of Christ; both words are perceived by Kierkegaard as suitable for usage in religious contexts. Yet at least in some contexts *Efterligne* denotes something negative. The root of *Efterligne* is “ligne,” translated in the English as “likeness” or “resemblance.” *Lighed*, often translated in the English as “likeness” or “equality,” is closely related to *Ligne*. The intended likeness can be external; it can also mean likeness in a more refined way, such as the likeness between characters, dispositions, and intentions. *Efterligne* indicates an effort to achieve an effect of *Lighed* and *Ligne*, namely one of similarity or correspondence.

One of the first usages of *Efterligne* in the authorship emerges in Frater Taciturnus's "Guilty?/Not Guilty?" from *Stages on Life's Way*. Titled "Quiet Despair," this peculiar entry engages similarity on a number of levels. It tells two stories that resemble and reinforce each other. In the opening story, an old man, Swift, contemplates his own image in a mirror and recognizes in it himself as a "Poor old man!" (SLW: 199/SKS 6: 187). This recognition seems straightforward. But there is more to it. Swift recognizes himself as reaping what he has sown; he ends up locked up in a mental institution he created, for which he pities himself. His life catches up with itself; by reduplicating his action, it has taken Swift full circle.

Retelling the first story, the second one breaks Swift into two figures: a father and a son. These figures mirror each other. The father recognizes himself in the son and vice versa. Yet, while Swift from the first story can recognize himself only with the perspective of passed time as deserving what he eventually fashioned for himself, the son can actually see in the father what awaits him "in the time to come" (SLW: 199/SKS 6: 187). This grim prospect is unavoidable. Like Swift, the father, from the perspective of passed time, pities his son ("Poor child") being perfectly aware that the son's quiet despair mirrors his own. Despite the fact that the son "saw much, heard much, experienced much, and was tried in various temptations," he turned out like his father. The quiet despair in the father is caused by the fact that the son will replicate his despair; the son's despair is caused by the anxiety of unavoidable despair. The reasons for the appropriation of the father's despair are of a psychological nature: "longing and loss" teach the son to "imitate [*efterligne*] his father's voice until the likeness [*Ligheden*] satisfied him" (SLW: 200/SKS 6: 188).

Finally, everyone acquainted with Kierkegaard's life can easily identify the autobiographical tinge of these tales. Especially the latter story mirrors Kierkegaard's own experiences with his father. Indeed, Kierkegaard literally attributes the phrase "quiet despair" to him in a remark on a journal entry: "This is what my father called: a quiet despair" (JP 1: 740/SKS 18:44, EE: 117). Nearly a year earlier, Kierkegaard notes the notorious "great earthquake" entry that diagnoses Michael Kierkegaard as a melancholic and the melancholy as a family condition caused by his father's alleged trespasses (JP 5: 5430/SKS 27: 291, Papir 305: 3). Inheriting the quiet despair of his father, hence reduplicating the unavoidable fate that lies ahead of him, Kierkegaard resembles his progenitor.

A number of journal entries situate "*ligne*" in light of the requirement of the imitation of Christ, where to imitate Christ means to be like him (i.e., JP 2: 1842/SKS 20: 269, NB3: 46; and SKS 20: 259, NB3: 30). Christ is the prototype and "we should be like [*ligne*] him and not merely reap benefits from him" (JP 2:1837/SKS 20:213, NB2:182). Being like Christ, or resembling Him, as it is often translated by the Hongs, means a range of efforts that can be only figuratively explained. An 1849 journal entry is rife with words related to *ligne*, and it appeals to a number of terms to

express Christ's *Efterligning*. It starts with a qualification that the imitation of Christ can be rendered through a metaphor (*Billede*), or literally an image, of rising up and dressing up (JP 2: 1858/SKS 22: 391, NB14: 80). To imitate Christ means to put Him on oneself like borrowed clothes (Kaftanski 2020). In the desire of a Christian to be like Christ ("*at eftertragte at ligne ham*"), one should appropriate His merits. This appropriation needs to be qualified. Kierkegaard adds:

Just as the expression he uses of his teaching, that it is food, is the strongest expression for appropriation, so the expression of putting on Christ is the strongest expression that the resembling [*Efterligningen*] must be according to the highest possible criterion. It does not say of Christ that you shall try to resemble [*stræbe at efterligne*] Christ (to say this implies indirectly that the two still remain essentially unlike [*ulige*]); no, you are to put on Christ, put him on yourself—as when someone goes around in borrowed clothes (this is *satisfactio vicaria*)—put him on, as when someone who looks strikingly like another [*skuffende ligner en Anden*] not only tries to resemble him [*efterligne ham*] but *re-presents* [*gjengiver*] him. Christ *gives* you his clothing (satisfaction) and asks you to *re-present* [*gjengive*] him.

(JP 2: 1858/SKS 22: 391, NB14: 80)

This quote is undoubtedly inspired by biblical language. Yet it is teeming with mimetic vocabulary, and Kierkegaard is trying to make a philosophical point here. The author's anxiety about the proper qualification of the representational dimension of the imitation of Christ concentrates on its metaphorical breadth. To appropriate Christ's teaching as if to consume it, as food is hardly a direct guideline. Resembling Christ's life, or more specifically, the ideal of life his existence represents, is illustrated by putting on something one does not actually have rights to, such as someone's clothes. The distinction between the owner of the clothes and the borrower secures the qualitative difference between the two that are *ulige*—unequal or indirect. However, putting on someone's clothes indicates a kind of inauthenticity, as it suggests passing oneself off as someone else; as we will see later, this concern for disingenuity drives Plato's criticism of imitation.

Ligne and *Lighed(en)* are widely used by Kierkegaard in his *Upbuilding Discourses* published in 1843 and 1844. The last of these discourses, *One Who Prays Aright Struggles in Prayer and Is Victorious—in That God Is Victorious*, engages *ligne* to account for humans' imitation of "the great and outstanding" figures of the world, self-imitation while being "face-to-face with God," and the desire to resemble and the state of resembling God. God's likeness can only be represented by an individual when one becomes truly nothing, by which Kierkegaard understands a state of a motionless, tranquil, and reconciled existence.

Only when he himself becomes nothing, only then can God illuminate [gjennemlyse] him so that he resembles God [*ligner Gud*]. However great he is, he cannot manifest [*udtrykke*] God's likeness [*Guds Lighed*]; God can imprint [*aftrykke*] himself in him only when he himself has become nothing.

(EUD: 399/SKS 5: 380)

The third of his 1843 *Four Upbuilding Discourses* features *Ligheden* no fewer than 35 times. This discourse, entitled “Every Good Gift and Every Perfect Gift Is from Above,” approaches the representational matter of wearing outfits with distrust and uses *Ligheden* to mean the state of equality before God. Worldly distinctions of status and respect, reflected in clothing that can negatively influence the perception of people's devotion and reinforce the illusion of social merits, are without value when it comes to “divine equality [*guddommelige Lighed*]” (EUD: 143/SKS 5: 145). Before God we are all alike, we are all *Ligheden*; this state of radical similarity shows the religious perspective on human social differences and the effects they produce in others. Our desire to emphasize these relative differences and incorporate them into our spiritual lives is caused by our desire for the “world's honour and people's admiration,” which in turn exert power over the financially less fortunate, intellectually less capable, and socially marginalized. *Ligheden* is then engaged by Kierkegaard to construct some elements of his ethics and moral psychology, but also social and political philosophy. Acts of goodness should be motivated by the realization that humans have similar needs. The motivation to produce good acts should be located not in the goodness of the act itself, nor in its consequences, but in the realization that the merit of goodness has a divine element to it (EUD 156–158/SKS 5: 156–158). Such acts contain in themselves the perfection that is God's attribute. As in “Every Good Gift and Every Perfection Is from Above,” there is a kind of underlying similarity or correspondence between all good acts. This goodness is the fabric of the community; its role is to “form the bond of perfection that knits [the] members [of a congregation] together in equality before God [*Lighed for Gud*]” (EUD: 141/SKS 5: 143).

Lastly, the similarity between people is of a special kind. Mindful of the second authorship that emphasizes difference as the qualifying feature of the single individuals, and Christians, one sees that equality does not ultimately make all people, on all levels, alike. “Divine equality,” says Kierkegaard, “like a fire burns ever more intensely in the difference without, however, humanly speaking, consuming it” (EUD: 143/SKS 5: 145). Hence, it is different from “external equality [*Lighed i det Udvortes*],” which analogously falsely projects the unifying principle of the spiritual realm on the temporal world.²

4.3 *Efterbelse and Efterfølgelse*

Published toward the end of his life, *What Christ Judges of Official Christianity* demonstrates Kierkegaard's ultimate dissatisfaction with *Eftergjøre* and *Efterligne* regarding the requirement of the imitation of Christ. Here, *Eftergjøre* and *Efterligne* are presented as faking and caricaturing the real cost of genuine Christian existence, namely willingly endangering one's life and exposing oneself to suffering. Therein, Kierkegaard laments the fact that modern Christianity has been turned into a pretense play and deception because the real risk it essentially entails has been abolished. To play "means to counterfeit, to mimic [*det er at eftergjøre, efterligne*] a danger where there is no danger" (M: 133/SKS 13: 177). Such pejorative reading of these two mimetic words is being contrasted with the *Efterfølgelse* demanded by Christianity. To better understand this key word from Kierkegaard's mimetic vocabulary, in the following section, I pay attention to its environment, the context within which it appears, and other related words.

The year 1847 marks a shift in Kierkegaard's economy of imitation. As he slowly enters the religious stage of his authorship, Kierkegaard minimizes the usage of *Eftergjøre* and refers a lot less to *Efterligne* and *Ligheden* in his writings on account of two distinct mimetic notions: *Efterbelse* and *Efterfølgelse*. They have been frequently presented in his journals as essentially opposing each other (M: 316/SKS 13: 378–379; JP 2: 1892/SKS 24: 177–178, NB22: 144). The former word, *Efterbelse*, has been translated into the English as "aping," but also "mimicking," and "parroting" by the Hongs. It denotes the lowest form of imitation attributed to parrots and quite unfairly to our ancestors, the primates. For Kierkegaard, *Efterber*³ is someone who engages imitation in an instinctual manner but also at minimal cost or effort, falling short of the human capacity for imitation. The latter, *Efterfølgelse*, has been customarily translated as "following after," which conveys the idea of conscious and reflective action, hence a higher type of imitation. Kierkegaard's sharp distinction between *Efterbelse*, which he understands as a negative and harmful type of imitation, and *Efterfølgelse*, which stands for a positive and rewarding type of imitation, corresponds with a distinction between two types of imitation in Plato. It also substantially overlaps with two distinct mimetic concepts from Kant, *Nachäffung* and *Nachfolge*.

In my reasoning I do not equate Plato's and Kierkegaard's accounts of imitation, nor do I reduce either of them to the other; rather, I point to critical similarities between them. Zooming in on Plato's two types of imitation offers us an important vantage point from which to see the complexity of imitation in Kierkegaard. Plato's distinction between two types of imitation practiced by two types of imitators is largely aligned with Kierkegaard's concerns about the character of both types of imitators and the quality of the imitative model. My approach to the comparison

between imitation in Kant and Kierkegaard is motivated by similar concerns. My brief reflection on Kant's distinction between *Nachäffung* and *Nachfolge*, but also two other types of imitation, offers insights on the conceptual differences in the natures of imitation in *Efterabelse* and *Efterfølgelse*.⁴

4.3.1 Plato and the Socratic

The subject of imitation in Plato has been widely debated by scholars. In my own understanding of his account of imitation, I follow the approach to the subject by J. Tate, who distinguishes negative and positive types of imitation in Plato's *Republic*. In his "Imitation' in Plato's *Republic*" (1928), Tate describes the first type of imitation as "forbidden; for it is harmful to identify oneself sympathetically (whether as poet, actor, or audience) with other people. In the first place, such imitation would destroy the singleness which must characterize the guardian" (1928: 17). The second type of imitation is "permitted; indeed, it is recommended. If the guardians imitate, they must imitate from childhood the qualities proper to their occupation, such as courage, purity, temperance" (Tate 1928: 17). The difference between the positive and negative types of imitation pertains to the influence imitation has on the character of the imitators but also to their attitude toward imitation. Tate suggests that "the guardians who practice [emulating the qualities proper to their occupation] will be imitating their own ideal character, not characters utterly alien from their own. It involves not the suppression but the development of the personality"; it is therefore crucial for the guardian to "tell his story for the most part in his own person" (1928: 18).

Tate demonstrates that Plato's criticism of imitation is in fact a disapproval of negative imitation rendered as "mak[ing] oneself like another." In that sense, Tate proposes reading its positive counterpart as nonimitative (he calls it "the non-imitative style"), which is a virtuous striving to become oneself, or an imitation of one's "true" self. This style of imitation is—in Kierkegaard's terms—dialectic because it is, quoting Tate, "non-imitative in the first sense yet imitative in the second sense" (1928: 18).

In his discussion of imitation, Plato uniquely describes both the quality of the imitative model and the imitator imitating that model. This consideration of both the imitator and the model prominently features in Kierkegaard's thought, where the latter is dubbed the prototype. One must be vigilant in recognizing genuine imitative models. As Plato suggests, Zeus, who should be the most excellent model for imitation, has his weaknesses, and therefore one must not imitate even gods without careful examination. When discussing the virtues of self-control, temperance, and self-restraint in the young, Socrates argues for the superiority of Odysseus over Zeus; the former could restrain himself, while the latter was dominated by his sexual desires. The guardian, as Socrates notices,

must be educated to recognize “the different forms moderation, courage, frankness, high-mindedness, and all their kindred, and their opposites too, which are moving around everywhere, and see them in the things in which they are, both themselves and their images” (*Republic*, 402c). Genuine imitation should operate in the nonimitative manner, when one imitates their own ideal self. Likewise, it must be approached with care; the philosopher looking at changeless ideas must constantly compare them with his emulations of those ideas in human beings (*Republic*, 501a–b).

Artists, but also poets, are presented by Plato as bad imitators as they can deceive children or guleless persons to think that what they encounter is real.⁵ Those creations are mere appearances; therefore, the artist creates things that both exist and lack existence—“an imitation of an imitation of reality” (Tate 1928: 20). The works of the artists are often made without any knowledge of truth, and artists often pretend to have some knowledge as they discuss various sciences and skills; Plato concludes, “a maker of an image—an imitator—knows nothing about that which is but only about its appearance” (*Republic*, 601b–c).

Kierkegaard’s distinction between *Efterabelse* and *Efterfølgelse* largely corresponds to Plato’s distinction between good and bad imitation. This is the case despite Kierkegaard’s departures from the Platonic orthodoxy mentioned a number of times in this book. In particular, Kierkegaard borrows from Plato his observation that it is the bad motivations and characterological predisposition to pretense that often motivate bad imitators to deceive others.

Kierkegaard criticizes *Efterabelse* in the context of his discussions of human nature and modern identity, both notions mimetically characterized by the phenomenon of comparison and fashion, explored in the concluding chapter of this book. *Efterabelse* appears roughly at the same time in *Works of Love* and his journals in 1847. Echoing Climacus’s scornful valuation of a man who organizes his life around social patterns and conventions and in consequence misses the work of God in his life from *Postscript*, in *Works of Love* Kierkegaard critically assesses an individual whose existence is likewise deprived of the viewpoint of the eternal thus: “Without the eternal, one lives with the help of habit, sagacity, aping [*Efterabelse*], experience, custom, and usage” (WL: 251/SKS 9: 250). This point about the human life that suffers from shortcomings that are caused by one’s conformity to social patterns and peer pressure is reiterated in a journal entry that maintains that instead of thinking about life, one mistakenly centers their action on the social expectations toward it. Such a pitiful individual outsources the task of figuring out what it means to live an authentic life to others:

God knows if there is one who has actually thought about life—not about what occupation he ought to take up or which girl he should

marry, etc., in these things constantly aping the others [*Efterabende at gjøre som de Andre*], but about life.

(JP 5: 6074/SKS 20: 248, NB3: 8)

Kierkegaard's critical account of this weakness of human nature, which has its roots in our natural propensity to mimicking, does not ease until the end of his literary production, hence his life. In 1854 writes:

Men are perfectible [*Perfectibile*]. They can be influenced to do one thing just as well as another, to fast as well as to live in worldly enjoyment—the most important thing is that they are just like the others, that they ape [*Efterabelse*] each other, do not stand alone.

(JP 3: 3560/SKS 25: 305, NB29: 13)

Perfectibility is not something positive for Kierkegaard in this and many other contexts. It does not mean here an ability to improve and enhance oneself; rather, it purports a certain plasticity, malleability, or moldability of human nature, all falsely attributed to the benefits of the historical progress of the human race and society (JP 1: 516/SKS 23: 85; JP 2: 2120/SKS 21: 156, NB8: 27). In line with Plato's account of imitation, which proves problematic when misused or abused by poets in the ideal polis, human perfectibility presents a challenge regarding the human tendency to lower the requirements that life puts before us. These obligations include the demand for self-examination and the practice of imitating qualities proper to one's occupation *à la* the guardians from the *Republic*. It is simply more convenient and pleasant to exist *en masse*, not as a single individual; we "relish everything called aping [*Efterabelse*]" (JP 3: 3560/SKS 25: 305, NB29: 13), Kierkegaard contemptuously observes.

Aping shapes human identity. In the previous quote on human perfectibility, "aping" is essentially connected with "being," and both words are modified by "others." This shows that one's identity is affected by comparative reference to other human beings. This idea is confirmed in Kierkegaard's journal entry of 1849, where he notes: "One becomes a human being by aping the others [*at efterabe de Andre*]. One does not know by himself that he is a human being but through inference: he is like the others—therefore he is a human being" (JP 3: 3558/SKS 22: 215, NB12: 121).

So defined, aping is a typically modern phenomenon for Kierkegaard; it portrays "citizens of a bourgeois democracy," who, as Pattison argues, "constantly negotiate their identity ... by 'comparison'" (2013: 19). The background for this is the human condition that Kierkegaard phrases as boredom and despair, and the social phenomenon of fashion. Human beings, in their lack of identity caused by the bankruptcy of religion, science, and politics, and in the advent or dawn of revolution, reestablish themselves by incorporating the qualities and values that are currently

in vogue. Those qualities come, on the one hand, from the self-contented bourgeois society celebrating the secure life of the city, and, on the other, from their opponents, celebrating the omnipotence of the individual who cannot be subjected to any artificial social constructs, ultimately leading to nihilism.

In his appraisal of the mimetic underpinnings of the modern subject, Rene Girard observes that the post-Enlightenment crisis of identity effectively “propels” individuals to direct questions of identity at other human beings, who are equally affected by its loss. Subsequently, one’s existence is not conducted in reference to one’s knowledge of oneself, or any fixed point for that matter, but in reference to being like others. This reflexive circle of identity outsourcing leads to the ultimate abandonment of a fixed point of reference that results in considering identity as either socially constructed or as a simulacrum, hence a representation, or in a Derridean sense, a trace of something without the signified (1973: 156). In either case, identity neither is inside the individual nor can be actually firmly established.

Imitation as aping contrasts with the second type of imitation, which I categorize as a positive type of imitation encapsulated in Kierkegaard’s *Efterfølgelse*. In this commanded type of imitation, Kierkegaard suggests that one’s identity is to be found in the true model for imitation, which, contrary to the social model presented earlier, is the ideal self that has been established by God. This model used to be present in society, maintains Kierkegaard, but it has been completely lost. The culprits are the compromised clergy of the Danish Lutheran Church, the scholarly elite, and the new ascendant class of wealthy entrepreneurs and landowners who equally contributed to the eradication of the genuine model of the ideal self.

Kierkegaard’s task is to reintroduce the qualities of the ideal self with its highest representation in the ideal Christian. This corresponds to the task of the true philosopher from Plato’s *Republic*. The authentic human being, which Kierkegaard names the single individual, must emulate in his own person the model for their best self. This rendering of imitation reminds us of what Tate called the “non-imitative style of imitation” which takes one’s ideal self as the model of imitation. Before the single individual will proceed with their imitative action, they have to gain knowledge of the imitative model, not mistaking it for a pseudo-ideal that has been re-created abstractly by philosophers and other intellectuals, that may subsequently appeal to qualities below the changeless standards. These standards are—as Socrates points out—fixed or immutable, and—as Kierkegaard clarifies—established by God; they cannot be altered according to social expectations. The emulators of the ideal fall under the requirements of the ideal in the first place. Socrates understands permanent self-discipline and diligence to be foremost among these requirements, and Kierkegaard points to continual inward deepening and self-examination.

A careful reading of Plato's text reveals an existential dimension of what has been introduced as "nonimitative imitation." As we have noted, on the one hand, the nonimitative type of imitation requires the imitator to recognize the ideals and to introduce them to society. On the other hand, the imitator first "imitates [the ideals] and tries to become as like them as he can" (*Republic*, 500c). The philosopher, as Socrates conveys, is thus "compelled to put what he sees there into people's characters, whether into a single person or into a populace, instead of shaping only his own" (*Republic*, 500d). This reflects the existential dimension of the ideal argued by the Danish thinker. Kierkegaard in his *Armed Neutrality* claims that the one who presents the "ideal picture of a Christian" must first admit that he does not represent the Christian ideal and thus he must fully subordinate himself to it. In fact, one can present the ideal only by implementing it in one's own life. Therefore, the work of the true philosopher incorporates the ideals coherently into the practices of men in both their private and their communal lives; this assures their existential integrity.

The work of the true philosopher is dialectical. It engages imitation oriented toward oneself and others, but also toward a set of values which, in the case of both Socrates and Kierkegaard, are rendered as fixed. To succeed in that dialectical endeavor, the philosopher requires what I term in Kierkegaard existential mimesis. As I will elaborate this notion in the final chapter of this book, existential mimesis is nonimitative, in the sense we have just established, and re-figurative, in the sense discussed in the previous chapter, but also indirect and intention-driven.

After building on Plato's *Republic* in my attempt to distinguish positive and negative types of imitation in Kierkegaard, I turn now to Plato's *Apology* and *Phaedo* to further define Kierkegaard's positive type of imitation: *Efterfølgelse*. Reading Kierkegaard alongside these texts complements the customary way of formulating *Efterfølgelse* in Kierkegaard in relation to the *imitatio Christi* tradition, but it also challenges it. To achieve this, I am drawing on Plato's Socrates to lay the foundations for *following after* in Kierkegaard and, what follows in the next chapter, for reading Socrates as one of Kierkegaard's prototypes for imitation. Thus, by reevaluating the genealogy of Kierkegaard's *Efterfølgelse*, I demonstrate that it is informed by non-biblical scholarship. Such a rendering of Kierkegaard's imitation emerges when analyzed in the context of its "mother concept," namely mimesis, an approach largely missing in the dominant appraisals of the phenomenon in question. In sum, my reading demonstrates that Kierkegaard's *Efterfølgelse* has a particularly rendered Socratic dimension.

The *Apology* gives Plato's account of the trial of Socrates and his apologetic speech. Socrates is "guilty of wrongdoing in that he busies himself studying things in the sky and below the earth; he makes the worse into the stronger argument, and he teaches these same things to others (*Apology*, 19b–c). His teaching has a negative impact on the young

of Athens, the prosecutors maintain. It makes the young intellectuals of Athens rebel against the State and reject the old ways of the people. In his defense, Socrates stipulates that the revolt of the young of Athens effectively consists in their following the example he sets for examining those who pretend to have knowledge. Yet, he does not have any interest in and authority over his followers. He clarifies:

the young men who follow me around of their own free will ... take pleasure in hearing people questioned; they themselves often imitate me and try to question others. ... The result is that those whom they question are angry, not with themselves but with me.

(Apology, 23c–d)

The *Apology* gives an indirect account of the transformation that occurs in Socrates' followers when they face their model. From simply attending his unscripted talks and witnessing him discrediting pretenders, his students become his followers in emulating his actions. Initially, they witnessed Socrates exposing the lack of knowledge in those who claimed to have it; now they voluntarily replicate that in examining others, discovering only imposters. Yet, this is something that cannot be blamed on Socrates; he is the first to let himself be questioned by "young or old" (*Apology*, 33a).

To make his case, Socrates tries to convince the judges that he is not a teacher in the ordinary sense of the word. Socrates juxtaposes himself with other teachers who are being remunerated for their services and who claim that they can teach their students "wisdom." The students of the Sophists, for example, gain some kind of knowledge of the world, which the Visitor from the Sophist ironically dubs "supreme and universal wisdom." The students of Socrates are not "typical" students; they do not attend any classes, they pay no fees, and they do not gain any knowledge. Emphasizing the utmost importance of subjectivity for one's genuine existence, Socrates encourages those who follow him to subjectively face the ultimate questions that pertain to their lives. This leads his students to redirect their investigations from the outer to the inner realm of human life. Having their subjectivity awakened by the teacher's direct and indirect instructions, the students of Socrates choose to follow him in examining their own lives and the lives of others, thus not in copying Socrates per se.

The jury's verdict of condemnation prompts Socrates to change his account on the matter of followers. After the final judgment is heard, Socrates declares that he indeed has followers. His disciples, who so far have been restrained by him, will bring upon the judges intensified criticism for the staged trial. This form of retribution will be aimed at those who, by sentencing the thinker to death, were trying to divert attention away from the merits of Socrates' accusations; indeed, the lack of integrity and honesty permeates their own private and public lives.

The Socratic aspect of *Efterfølgelse* is developed in *Phaedo*—a thematic and sequential extension of the *Apology*. Awaiting execution in prison, Socrates spends his last moments philosophizing with his friends and “students” on the notorious subject of death as the call of all true philosophers. At the very beginning of *Phaedo*, Cebes gives an account of a certain Evenus, who inquired into the reasons behind Socrates’ interest in composing poetic works aiming to praise Apollo. Socrates’ response to Cebes’ investigation occurs on two interrelated levels. The first response offers a religious account for the reasons why Socrates gets involved in a “popular art,” by which he means writing poetry and hymns to gods. The thinker expounds that he followed the visions of his dreams that commanded him to “practice and cultivate the arts” (*Phaedo*, 60e). In a similar manner to what had been stated in the *Apology*, where Socrates follows an internal voice of subjectivity, the wise man obeys the supernatural directive from his dreams. The second response occurs on a different level and changes the theme and dynamics of the discussion that follows. Socrates directs a quite unusual personal message to Evenus thus: “Tell this to Evenus, Cebes, wish him well and bid him farewell, and tell him, if he is wise, to *follow me as soon as possible*. I am leaving today, it seems, as the Athenians so order it” (*Phaedo*, 61c, italics mine).

Socrates both bids farewell and advises Evenus to follow him as quickly as he can. The latter response seems strange to a friend of Evenus, Simmias, who realizes that Socrates is encouraging Evenus to willingly part with his life if what Evenus really seeks is wisdom. The true philosopher is ready to eagerly let go of one’s life, and such an individual is “properly grounded in philosophy.” Such argumentation is confirmed by Socrates’ imminent death and the symbolic act of lowering his feet to the ground.⁶

By challenging Evenus, Socrates indicates that religious tasks, represented in writing poetry to praise Apollo, require the involvement of one’s subjectivity. The religious is much more than the aesthetic, and as such it cannot be reduced to a poetic production that has only an artistic value. This dialogue contains another eminent instance of Plato’s concept of existential imitation. Here, facing death, Socrates urges Evenus to understand that if he really seeks wisdom, he should follow Socrates in voluntarily parting with his life. What Socrates requests is not suicide, as it appears, but an uncompromising act of *following after* one’s internal voice. Evenus should not look for splendor or success as a poet; rather, he should see that Socrates’ engagement with that kind of art is a display of his unbending obedience to the inner voice of his spirit.

4.3.2 Kant’s Nachfolge

Discussing genius in Chapter 1, I signposted Kant’s four types of imitation in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. They are *Nachäffung*, *Nachmachung*, *Nachahmung*, and *Nachfolge*. The first word has been

translated into English as “aping” or “parroting”; *Nachmachung* has been translated as “copying”; “imitation” is the usual translation of *Nachahmung*; *Nachfolge* has been translated as “emulating,” “following,” but also as “succeeding.” Kant’s mimetic vocabulary also contains such words as *Muster*, *Exemplar*, and *Beispiel*, which greatly correspond to Kierkegaard’s “model” and “prototype” discussed in Chapter 5.⁷ While Kant does not offer a systematic treatment of these terms, and he admits to struggling with distinctions between most of them, one can roughly differentiate their discrete senses from the text.

In §32, elaborating the philosophical method engaged in formulating judgments of taste, Kant dubs adhering to preestablished laws and rules created by classical figures as following “an imitative reason [*nachahmende Vernunft*]” (Kant 2000: 163/§32). Such imitation pertains to observing predetermined models [*Musteren*] and relinquishing the ideal of the autonomy of taste that can be reached independently by any individual. Regarding the ideal of philosophical investigation, one should neither look for models to follow nor create followers, as doing so would turn them into “mere imitators [*bloßen Nachahmern*].” Rather, one should motivate others to search for philosophical principles in themselves. This rule is also universally applicable to religion. One should conjure the right “rule of conduct” without outsourcing it to any kind of “example of virtue or holiness [*Beispiel der Tugend oder Heiligkeit*].” Otherwise, there is a danger that such outsourcing itself becomes a rule, which Kant calls “a mechanism of imitation [*einen Mechanismus der Nachahmung*].” While critical of imitation, Kant does not rule it out entirely with regard to the law of acquisition. He identifies *Nachfolge*—contrasted with *Nachahmung*—as the type of imitation that has a motivational character, and it redirects the individual toward the right method of obtaining knowledge of the principles of morality from oneself.

Succession [*Nachfolge*], related to a precedent, not imitation [*Nachahmung*], is the correct expression for any influence that the products of an exemplary [*Exemplarischen*] author can have on others, which means no more than to create from the same sources from which the latter created, and to learn from one’s predecessor only the manner of conducting oneself in so doing.

(Kant 2000: 164/§32)

The notorious §47 contrasts two conceptualizations of imitation in Kant. It sets off with the idea that genius is opposed to “the spirit of imitation [*daß Genie dem Nachahmungsgeiste*]” because that which counts as genius cannot be learned and learning is imitation [*Nachahmen*]” (Kant 2000: 187/§47). Knowing that genius’s domain is (beautiful) art, Kant inquires about the principles that rule it. In contrast to science and philosophy, art cannot be taught; it is a matter of special yet natural

endowment, talent. Geniuses are nature's "favorites"; the awareness of their own gift is awakened when they encounter "an example [*Beispiels*] in order to let the talent of which he is aware operate in a similar way" (Kant 2000: 188). This means that while they cannot teach others their skills, and their own capability can be prompted by the productions of other talents, their production acts in the service of the same idea with respect to other potential geniuses. Kant says, "The rule [to art] must be abstracted from the deed, i.e., from the product, against which others may test their own talent, letting it serve as a model [*Muster*] not for copying [*Nachmachung*] but for imitation [*Nachahmung*]" (Kant 2000: 188). Kant presents *Nachmachung* as imitation of a lower kind, focused on reproducing a physical act. In contrast, *Nachahmung* entails a more reflective type of imitation characterizing a learner in process.

The difference between *Nachahmung* and *Nachmachung* is elaborated briefly in the second part of §49, where Kant introduces the fourth conceptualization of imitation, *Nachäffung*. Kant introduces it to tackle the issue of principles around the imitation of genius. As he has already shifted the focus from genius to its creation, Kant now radically opposes *Nachfolge* to *Nachäffung*, indicating the latter as the lowest possible way of approaching the product of genius. This long quotation that follows allows us to trace his reasoning for differentiating *Nachfolge* and *Nachäffung*; it also provides us with an important resource for understanding Kierkegaard's conceptualizations of *Efterfølgelse* and *Efterbelse* and the respective differences between these two types of imitation.

Ascribing the characteristic of "the exemplary originality [*die musterhafte Originalität*]" to genius, Kant states that

the product of a genius ... is an example [*Beispiel*], not for imitation [*der Nachahmung*] (for then that which is genius in it and constitutes the spirit of the work would be lost), but for emulation [*Nachfolge*] by another genius, who is thereby awakened to the feeling of his own originality, to exercise freedom from coercion in his art in such a way that the latter thereby itself acquires a new rule, by which the talent shows itself as exemplary [*musterhaft*]. But since the genius is a favorite of nature...his example for other good minds gives rise to a school, i.e., a methodological instruction in accordance with rules ...

But this imitation [*Nachahmung*] becomes aping [*Nachäffung*] if the student copies [*nachmacht*] everything, even down to that which the genius had to leave in, as a deformity, only because it could not easily have been removed without weakening the ideal.

Mannerism [*Das Manierieren*] is another sort of aping [*Nachäffung*], namely, that of mere individuality (originality) in general, in order to distance oneself as far as possible from imitators [*Nachmachern*], yet without having the talent thereby to be exemplary [*musterhaft*] at the same time.

(Kant 2000: 195-6/§49)

Nachahmung and *Nachmachung* are contrasted to show the difference in the intensity of reflection exhibited by the student imitating the product of genius. While *Nachahmung* suggests imitation that constitutes but also involves the process of learning, discernment, and analysis, *Nachmachung* means detailed but also diligent copying. Marrying *Nachahmung* with *Nachmachung* with regard to the product of genius impedes efforts to, using Kant's parlance, understand the rules and principles of the artwork. These precepts must be derived from the object, and then they will allow one to genuinely "learn" the idea behind the product of genius.

Nachahmung and *Nachmachung* differ from *Nachfolge* and *Nachäffung*, which are represented as radically opposing each other. In a similar fashion to the Danish *Efterabelse*, the word *Nachäffung* derives from two words: the preposition "after" or "to," and the noun "ape." Using Kierkegaard's vocabulary, Kant's rendering of *Nachäffung* is dialectical. On the one hand, it denotes the failed approach of the student to the object of imitation in the production of genius. The second quotation from §49 indicates that *Nachäffung* results from a misunderstanding of the object of imitation and imitating without "learning." Such imitation, *Nachmachung* in Kant, is aligned with Kierkegaard's monotonous repetition [*eensformige Gjentaelse*], which he attributes, for instance, to the defrocked Bishop Adler, whose writing style is characterized by mindless and droning repetition of short phrases. Detailed repetition of copied text Kierkegaard finds boring and pointless because the author "has not had or does not have anything new to bring (the content)" (BA: 283/SKS 15: 230). Kierkegaard diagnoses this mechanism as aiming to bring a kind of intoxication to Adler:

He seizes upon a very simple expression, a brief saying; he then unthinkingly disconnects it; he connects it, again unthinkingly, with something else but continues to repeat it until this monotonous repetition [*eensformige Gjentaelse*] anesthetizes him and brings him into an excited state.

(BA: 295/SKS 15: 241)

Adler's "demented repetition to the *n*th power" (BA: 81/Pap. VIII-2 B 7) appeals to lower human capacities as he "treats the reader just like a child" (BA: 294/15: 241).

On the other hand, *Nachäffung* means an attitude and acting to deceive people that one is a genius themselves. The third quotation calls this mannerism and defines it as distancing oneself from other people just for the sake of producing in others a false perception that one is a genius with talent. Someone involved in aping preemptively discourages potential imitators from imitating him, and at the same time superficially imitating the esteem and prestige of a genius by passing oneself off as one. As Kant adds subsequently, such a person's actions can never be "adequate to the idea," because, instead of appealing to the means of reason, he affects others on the emotional and affective level. The parallels between *Efterabelse* and

Nachäffung, but also bad imitation in Plato, are hard to miss. For Plato, Kant, and Kierkegaard, imitation understood in this negative way revolves around the skewed intentions and motivations of the imitator who, on some level accepting their own insincerity, is an actor, “bungler,” or a fraud.

Nachfolge represents a different type of imitation from *Nachäffung*, *Nachahmung*, and *Nachmachung*. As already indicated in Chapter 1, it is the only legitimate type of imitation between geniuses, which as such has a motivational rather than instructional character. Any of the three remaining types of imitation will eventually trample the spirit of the work imitated; this spirit is capable of awakening the extraordinary capacities of potential geniuses. From the previous quotation we learn that *Nachfolge* is characterized by a large measure of freedom on the part of the imitator who “itself acquires a new rule, by which the talent shows itself as exemplary.” *Nachfolge* then moves beyond the classical rules of art and expression and is oriented toward creating new sets of principles that are future-oriented. Lastly, by understanding the idea behind the imitated object, the imitator can leave out some of its aspects; *Nachfolge* assumes interpretation as part of the imitative process, which, in contrast to *Nachäffung*, is not one in which anything goes.

Parallels between Kant’s *Nachfolge* and Kierkegaard’s *Efterfølgelse* are easily noticeable. Two important features of both conceptualizations of imitation are the emphasis on freedom and the awakening effected by imitation. Kierkegaard’s vision that his literary work will awaken a handful of like-minded followers overlaps with the awakening produced by *Nachfolge* between like-minded and endowed artists. His work is indeed intended for “edification and awakening,” as the subtitle of *The Sickness unto Death* stipulates (SUD: 1/SKS 11: 115). Moreover, awakening will be prompted by the most radical act of the imitation of Christ expressed in “let[ting] oneself be put to death for the truth,” as H.H. says in *Two Ethical Religious Essays* (WA: 84/SKS 11: 88). The precepts of Kant’s awakening in *Nachfolge* cannot be defined in principles, as that would mean that the talent of genius can be taught and learned. Similarly, as explained in *Practice in Christianity*, the mysterious magnetism of the imitation of Christ, while awakening, cannot be explained. We are drawn to Christ, especially to his suffering and lowliness, but we cannot explain why that is so (PC: 167/SKS 12: 170).

Characterizing Kierkegaard’s *Efterfølgelse* in terms of freedom may come across as surprising, especially when we consider his relentless insistence on martyrdom, sacrifice, and suffering as its requirements. What we see when we compare Kant’s *Nachfolge* and Kierkegaard’s *Efterfølgelse*, and what will be made more visible in the concept of existential mimesis discussed in the last chapter of this book, is that *Efterfølgelse* is a process of following someone, often from a distance. Indeed, Kierkegaard’s *følge Christum efter*, the imitation of Christ, occurs in the absence of the one followed. Following in Christ’s footsteps does not entail that they are in plain sight or easily identifiable. Following Schweiker, *Efterfølgelse* entails a hermeneutic task that cannot be “outsourced” to an exemplar.

This interpretative duty has an individual and subjective character, in contrast to imitation that follows a preset standardizing pattern that can be adhered to on a mass scale. Individually, one must engage with *Efterfølgelse* having recourse only to a rough sketch of what it is. Kierkegaard's instruction on the imitation of Christ, as we observe in his religious discourses, is only a "guidance" (UDVS: 217/SKS 8: 319).

Is *Efterfølgelse* a fundamentally religious concept? Does *Efterfølgelse* presuppose a form of elitism on the part of the imitator by excessively raising the bar of authentic existence? While in fact the imitation at stake predominantly refers to the specifically religious phenomenon of the imitation of Christ in his writings, it should not escape our notice that Kierkegaard's conceptualization of imitation aims at something novel that also operates outside the Christian paradigm. As I argue throughout this book, Kierkegaard's engagement with the complexity and paradoxicality of the imitation of Christ inspires him to rethink mimesis as a concept and to give it a new and positive meaning. He approaches mimesis dialectically, and most diagnostic efforts are focused on identifying the areas of human existence wherein mimesis keeps us from reaching our full potential, which he sees in our propensity to aping, being like others, following trends, or pretending to be someone we are not. These negative mimetic inclinations have a largely deindividualizing effect that is problematic to the ideal of authentic existence. They are not unique to Christians. They are as present in Kierkegaard's times as in the contemporary world in which experiences of living in the world produce in individuals the feelings of estrangement and alienation, who then seek the remedy to these negative feelings in mimetic collective behaviors. Kierkegaard's positive response to the modern dilemmas with mimesis is encapsulated in his concept of existential mimesis, which, while focusing on the individual, does not place the imitator in an elevated position based on their functions and education, as it is no Plato and Aristotle, nor based on their extraordinary skills or moral merits, as in Kant. While fundamentally emphasizing the significance of human individuality, Kierkegaard's existential mimesis is an egalitarian project built on his vision of social and political equality that disregards all relative and contingent differences between people.

Notes

- 1 Cf. *Ordbog over der danske Sprog*, vol. 4, columns 138-141; Cf. Stan 2014: 203.
- 2 See also Hegel's complex understanding of difference rendered into three related notions, namely, "absolute difference" [*der absolute Unterschied*], "diversity" [*Verschiedenheit*], and "opposition" [*Gegensatz*] (Stewart 2015: 241-244).
- 3 Kierkegaard also uses "Eftersnakker" to denote parroting (JP 3: 2907/SKS NB29: 105, SKS 25, 367) "as a number among the millions, as a parrot [*Eftersnakker*] and mimic [*Efteraber*] who lets another person apprehend some truth in the most horrible agony."

- 4 An important conceptual distinction between *Efterfølgelse* and *Efterbelse* in the so-called the Lily Discourses has been offered in Maughan-Brown (2019).
- 5 In his discussion of imitation in the *Republic*, Socrates distinguishes three parties: God, as the ultimate creator (real creator); the craftsman, as the manufacturer of a particular representation of the things ultimately created; and the artist, who renders particular representations of the ultimate reality—in that the artist represents things as they appear, not as they are. Socrates clearly distinguishes them from the craftsmen. He also indicates that the artist is someone who does not imitate “that which originally exists in nature”—as the craftsman does—but imitates only objects that are already representations of something else. The artist then is “by nature third from the king and the truth” (*Republic*, 597e).
- 6 I am grateful to Jeffrey Hanson for this observation.
- 7 An informative perspective on the link between imitation in Kant and Kierkegaard in the context of authenticity and moral development is present in Pickett (2017: 85–95).

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5 The Prototypes

Kierkegaard's *Forbillede* denotes that which represents an idealized and hence "prototypical" quality of someone or something. The Danish *Forbillede*, also translated into English as "pattern," comes from *Billede*, which stands for "image." *Forbillede* is an important mimetic term that refers to a special mimetic quality of representation. It can be understood as a super-image. While an image is a representation of something, *Forbillede* represents in an eminent sense. To demonstrate the richness of the notion of the prototype in Kierkegaard's thought, which goes beyond the customary way of reading Christ as the only model for genuine (Christian) existence, in this chapter I consider several mimetic models from his writings. I categorize these prototypes as external and internal, but also positive and negative. This exposition of the plurality of prototypes in Kierkegaard is preceded by a historical account of the subject of the mimetic model that prefigures his *Forbillede*, in the notions of *figura* and *exemplum*. Proceeding in this way showcases Kierkegaard's skillful continuation of and unique contribution to this long intellectual tradition. This chapter furthers the overall thesis of the present book with regard to the richness of mimesis in Kierkegaard exemplified in his production of and engagement with a range of unique mimetic models in his thought.

5.1 Plurality of Mimetic Models

5.1.1 *Figura and Exemplum*

Forbillede—the prototype—plays an important role in Kierkegaard's *Efterfølgelse*—imitation, discussed in the previous chapter. *Efterfølgelse* essentially interrelates an imitator and the object of imitation, *Forbillede*. In that sense, imitation falls under what Gebauer and Wulf characterize as acting or "creation in reference to a model" (1995: 61). This conceptualization of mimesis as *imitatio* was dominant in the Middle Ages through the Renaissance and was characterized by three factors: "it is reproduction in accordance with an idea; it constitutes a relation of succession in

reference to a model; and it produces a similarity to the model and ... has the nature of the probable” (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 61).

Kierkegaard’s rendering of imitation in reference to a model is dialectical. It is appraised as a movement or relationship that occurs between the imitator and the prototype. On the one hand, the imitator tries to conform their life to the prototype, which is the movement from the imitator toward the realm of the prototype. On the other hand, imitation is “mak[ing] an attempt to place ‘the prototype’ into actuality,” which is the movement from the ideal to the actual (JP 2: 1879/SKS 24: 14, NB21: 9). Accordingly, then, imitation is a double-movement that “engages” two spheres: the sphere of the imitator and the sphere of the prototype.

Scholars in the field have rightly pointed to the fact that Christ is the model for imitation in Kierkegaard. This is especially true in the context of Kierkegaard’s deliberation on what it means to be and become a genuine Christian. However, upon closer inspection, Kierkegaard’s thought reveals that Christ’s uniqueness in that regard does not refer to his singularity. In fact, Kierkegaard often speaks of more than one prototype. He names particular persons and literary entities/characters as prototypes. He also attributes prototypicality to simply identify a customary way of thinking about something or doing something in a way in which others normally do it (CI: 219/SKS 1: 263; CUP1: 56/SKS 7: 60). The word is then used to describe a specific way of rendering ideas or concepts; such is the case in Climacus’s view of the typical abstract way of understanding being: “The term ‘being’ in those definitions must, then, be understood much more abstractly as the abstract rendition of the abstract prototype [*abstrakte Forbillede*] of what being *in concreto* is as empirical being” (CUP1: 190/SKS 7: 174).

A more refined way of employing *Forbillede* is at work in Kierkegaard’s attempts to create a range of typical human personas that are prototypical of human ways of life. *The Seducer’s Diary*, describing and evaluating the life of a character named Edward, notices that he is indeed an “iteration” of a model character, Fritz, exemplified in an Augustin E. Scribe’s play *Bruden*: “Moreover, like his prototype, Edward is a corporal in the civic militia” (EO1: 353–354/SKS 2: 343). In saying this, Kierkegaard assumes that there is something universal about Fritz’s nature from *Bruden*, which is exemplified in the figure of his own character, Edward. In the same manner, Romeo and Juliet are perceived (SLV: 168/SKS 6: 157) as the prototype of a loving couple in *Stages on Life’s Way’s* “Reflection on Marriage.” Their tragic love is the ultimate point of reference for lovers.

This understanding of prototype follows the Greco-Roman concepts of *figura* and *exemplum*. The classic appraisal of *figura* we find in Erich Auerbach’s essay with the eponymous title “*Figura*” (1984). First, this text provides us with several meanings of *figura* such as form, shape, structure, schema, example. Second, *figura* was used as the translation of the Greek *typos*, the sense of which is retained in Kierkegaard’s “prototype”

or “pattern” and “image.” Auerbach’s account of *figura* states that “[i]t was not only the plastic sense of *typos*, but also its inclination toward the universal, lawful, and exemplary ... that exerted an influence on *figura*” (1984: 15). This means that as such, *figura* denotes something material and visual, but also formal and structural. Referring to the Roman thinker and poet Lucretius, whose work Kierkegaard was familiar with, Auerbach notes that *figura* was used to elaborate the relation between model and copy (*forma* and *imago*), which he illustrates by the relation between children and their parents. It is said that children resemble their parents (and also grandparents) in the sense they are “*utriusque figurae* (‘of both *figurae*’),” as they bear a resemblance (physical, mental, of characters, inclinations, etc.) to both parents (Auerbach 1984: 16). In that sense, so crucial to the correct understanding of Kierkegaard’s mimetic model, “copy” is not worthless in reference to the “original”; indeed, children are complete and fully valuable beings.

The Church Fathers used *figura* to denote the “prefigurative” sense of the Old Testament in relation to the New Testament, where “the persons and events of the Old Testament were *prefigurations* of the New Testament and its history of salvation” (Auerbach 1984: 29). In that sense Joshua is treated by Tertullian as a Christ-type, as “a phenomenal prophecy or prefiguration of the future Saviour” (Auerbach 1984: 29). In a similar manner, “Moses is *figura Christi*” for Augustine (Auerbach 1984: 38). The meanings that come with the terms *figura* and *prefiguration* are in fact renderings of the Greek *typos*, and as such are related to *imago*, in the sense of the Biblical *ad imaginem Dei* (Auerbach 1984: 44–48). Here, *figura* is “the creative, formative principle, change amid the enduring essence, the shades of meaning between copy and archetype” (Auerbach 1984: 49). Therefore, apart from *merely* being a mimetic model, *figura* already embodies and determines its modes of interpretation, appropriation, and representation—in short, its logic. It also qualifies the relation between itself and its relative referent.

Exemplum is another mimetic concept that is helpful in conceptualizing and understanding Kierkegaard’s mimetic model. It does so by elaborating on the relationship between the original and its re-presentation and draws connections between the phenomena of imitation of God(s), virtuous characters and their symbolic (nonhuman) representations. The term underpins the Pauline understanding of human nature, expressed in the notion of man as the image of God, according to George H. van Kooten (2008). Tracing the transition of non-Christian renderings of the human being as an image of God to their Christian forms, van Kooten points to a fundamental understanding of the image of God in “the wise and the virtuous” in Greco-Roman paganism. In that context, a human as an image of God is understood in relation to his capacity to be moral, knowledgeable, and virtuous. Van Kooten quotes Cicero, who says, “virtue exists in man and God alike” (2008: 106) and Cleanthes in *Hymn to Zeus*, who

declares that “we have origin in you bearing a likeness to God,” a theme that, according to J.C. Thom, may have influenced Marcus Manilius’ understanding of man as *exemplum dei*. *Exemplum* here is the Latin translation of the Greek *mimema*, a rendering often used synonymously with the Greek *eikon*, rendered into the Latin *imago* (van Kooten 2008: 104–105).¹ This important-for-the-Stoics notion of man as *exemplum dei* undergoes a transformation from Seneca’s concept of perfection of human reason in accordance with God’s intelligence to a more Platonic command to understand and resemble God presented in the account of Epictetus:

Next we must learn what the gods are like. For whatever their character is discovered to be, the man who is going to please and obey them must endeavour *as best as he can to become assimilated to them*. [...] Therefore, in everything he says and does, he must act as an emulator, a zealous admirer and follower of God.

(van Kooten 2008: 159–160)²

Without a doubt, this resonates with the person of the apostle Paul (greatly influenced by the Stoics) and the ideas he introduced in his letters, but it also bears some resemblance to Kierkegaard’s thought. *Exempla* are also an important part of Roman education. To a large extent Pauline letters resemble the literary genre of *exempla*, which teaches morality and virtues of moderation. An instance of such teachings can be found in the famous compilation by Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*.

There are other types of *exempla* that do not represent, emulate or imitate God, gods, or people, but rather become *exempla* by virtue of their actions, often tragic or heroic. This means that in contrast to the *exempla* whose deeds are qualified by a theological quest of “becoming like God insofar as is possible,” they become another type of *exempla* through undertaking actions or behaving in a particular way that we find paradigmatic. In that sense Niobe is one such *exemplum*. Without going into details, we know from Homer’s account that due to her distress and loss, she “becomes the paradigm of inconsolability” (Lowrie 1997: 48). She turns into stone and her paradigmatic applicability is secured by her transition from the realm of the human—reflection—to the realm of nature—immediacy. She is what she is by what she is evermore: a weeping stone that is an image of everlasting sorrow. Her example is often given as an instruction for consolation, temperance, and self-control. In that sense Climacus presents Don Quixote as an exemplum of the tragic, dubbing him “the prototype of the subjective lunacy in which the passion of inwardness grasps a particular fixed finite idea” (CUP1: 195/SKS 7: 179).

In a distinct way Kierkegaard integrates moral and religious models from the Classical and biblical traditions to generate prototypes that act

as pointers toward authentic existence. I divide these models into external and internal. They are external mimetic models in the sense that they are presented as external to the imitator. They can be identified as particular historical and fictional figures—such as Socrates, Abraham, and Job, but also the tax collector and the woman who was a sinner from the New Testament. If one understands “prototype” in a broad sense, namely as an ideal that an individual should internalize, akin to the task of the guardians/philosophers from the *Republic*, one can also identify in Kierkegaard’s authorship what I call “internal” imitative models. These are normatively charged universal structures of the human self. In the last chapter of this book, I will elaborate the figure of “the lily and the bird” from Gospels that represents Kierkegaard’s special category of the prototype that I categorize as indirect. Like other external and internal prototypes, “the lily and the bird” challenges our conceptualization of the mimetic model whose imitation guides us on the path to becoming a genuine human being.

Apart from positive prototypes for authentic existence, Kierkegaard indicates negative models such as pastors, assistant professors, journalists. In that respect, he is especially scornful of his contemporary Bishop Mynster. He picks on Mynster’s lavish lifestyle deemed to be at odds with the life of the Apostles. After his successor Bishop Martensen pronounces Mynster “witness, truth-witness” following his death, Kierkegaard explodes with a series of short pieces, mostly newspaper articles, that denounce the problematic nature of these claims. For Kierkegaard, Mynster misrepresents what being a Christian is essentially about, lest to be the prototype of that (M: 19–24/SKS 14: 141–143). Kierkegaard is also enraged about Bishop Martensen’s presumed opportunistic move to call his predecessor “truth-witness,” shameless indecency that tramples on the achievements of witnesses to the truth and martyrs.

5.1.2 Religious Prototypes

A special type of prototypes in Kierkegaard can be found in models of religious existence. A number of preliminary accounts of religious models appear in his pseudonymous *Stages of Life’s Way*. Thinking more broadly about the category of the tragic, Frater Taciturnus locates the tragic hero at the center of the aesthetic way of life in contrast to the religious life that takes as its prototype a religious person in an eminent sense: “What the tragic hero is in the esthetic, the religious prototype (of course, I am here thinking only of devout individuals etc.) is for the religious consciousness” (SLW: 439/SKS 6: 406). Interestingly, a deleted fragment that further elaborates this point talks not about one concrete prototype of religious existence, but about religious prototypes that are to be understood as ideal figures rather than real existing historical figures (SLW: 633/Pap. V B 148:17). This plurality of religious prototypes is also

mentioned at a different place in the *Stages*, where the author of “Guilty?/ Not Guilty” struggles with the philosophical problem of imitating the prototypes through the category of appropriation (SLW: 258/SKS 6: 241).

A journal entry from 1850, commenting on how the Dane is continuously misunderstood in society, discloses that misunderstanding arises from the factor that is located in the contrasting categories that are fundamental to both respective parties. Clearly referencing *The Apology*, Kierkegaard presents himself as being absorbed by religious prototypes who do not resort to life-preserving evasions, but who embrace martyrdom just as Socrates did:

My contemporaries have only worldly categories; thus they expected and expect either that I would escape my mistreatment by taking a journey, for example, or that I will defend myself. I am, however, engrossed with the religious prototypes, whose identifying mark is suffering.

(PV: 244/SKS 23: 195, NB17: 47)

A similar remark reiterating martyrdom as essential to religious prototypes appears in another of his journal entries from the same year. “It will always be true of the prototypes [*Forbillederne*] that in contemporaneity their contemporaries will feel sorry for them as the most unfortunate of all people. They will be victorious—after their death” (JP 2: 1927/SKS 25: 284, NB28: 95).

The prototypical aspect of religious figures is also ascribed to “heroes of faith” and “witnesses to the truth.” As Kierkegaard’s appraisal of the former is not consistent throughout the authorship, a witness to the truth is characterized by their steadfastness with regard to the highest requirement of Christianity, namely seeking suffering and embracing martyrdom. Witnesses to the truth are also presented as the prey or even the food for “entire legions of professors and pastors, together with their families, [who] are able to live by consuming them” (JP 4: 4986/SKS 26: 233, NB32: 136). Initially juxtaposed with the knight of faith, a hero is someone who courageously attempts to achieve that which is publicly admired. Johannes de silentio’s tragic hero achieves admiration by sacrificing his own good for some other benefits, a good greater than his own. A hero of faith is someone who, as Robert Perkins’s reading of Abraham indicates, strives to keep or regain his faith in the face of the unexplainable (Perkins 1981: 54). Published simultaneously with *Fear and Trembling, Repetition* presents Job as not being a hero of faith, because, as Constantin Constantius elucidates, Job’s category is not faith but “ordeal.” This category does not belong to dogmatics, by which the author understands a conceptual representation of religious tenets; rather, it is “altogether transcendent” and “places a person in a purely personal relationship of opposition to God” (R: 210/SKS 4:77).

Does this mean that Job is somehow inferior to Abraham, the witness to the truth, and other prototypes as suggested by the Hongs? (R: 372 note 44). Published in 1851, *For Self-Examination* lines together “the heroes of faith and witnesses to the truth” without identifying any specific differences between them (FSE: 21–22/SKS 13: 48). Unpublished during his life, *Judge for Yourself!*, also written around 1851, puts on the same level “heroes of faith and the martyrs and the witnesses to the truth and the models [*Forbillederne*]” discussing “Christian venturing” and “venturing in reliance upon God” that requires unwavering belief that God is in control. Such belief characterizes the models of faith who are not calculative and sagacious but act in faith, even disregarding the laws of probability (JFY: 99–101/SKS 16: 157–158).

Kierkegaard’s reference to several religious prototypes combines his Platonic model-oriented thinking with his view of the essentially “processual” nature of human existence. The fact that human beings are in a process of becoming necessitates the need to engage with a range of prototypes, rather than with one specific model, as the customary reading suggests (Ziolkowski 2011: 165–167). So defined, a human being goes through various phases of existence, which have their own discrete variations, and hence one needs a number of mimetic pointers that could guide them toward a desired mode of existence. Put differently, even in the religious sphere of existence, no one is at the same “place” as another human being is, but we are all scattered on the spectrum of the development of being that never really reaches the ideal. This is why, especially in the religious existence, while we are meant to be in an intimate relationship with the Absolute, we are yet deprived of particular models that are in a one-to-one relation to us, and that could help us achieve authentic religious existence.

This pertains also to Christ. To understand this, we have to take “the perspective” of mimesis and look for clues in support of this unsurprisingly radical thesis in his writings. Before I offer arguments that bolster my claim about the limitations that Kierkegaard sees in Christ the prototype, I will first elaborate a number of distinct prototypes that are either explicitly mentioned in his works as “anonymous” prototypes or “relative prototypes” (PV: 103/SKS 16: 83), or which can be extracted from his works through a careful reading.

5.2 External Models

5.2.1 *Socrates and Abraham*

Socrates is a specific type of prototype for Kierkegaard. He undertakes an impressive historical and critical study of Socrates in his magister dissertation at the University of Copenhagen, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*. This work opens with a curious thesis, *Similitudo Christum inter et Socratem in dissimilitudine praecipue*

est posita, which can be translated as “The similarity between Jesus and Socrates consists principally in their dissimilarity.” This motif of (dis)similarity between the two, which runs throughout his authorship, is taken by Kierkegaard to argue for a fundamental difference, but also a great similarity between Socrates and Christ. Engaging the category of *Discipulen*, translated as “followers” by the Hongs, Kierkegaard employs Socrates as the model for his understanding of Christ as the prototype who seeks individuals as imitators and requires martyrdom from them. This radical philosophical-theological move is not an expression of Christian orthodoxy; as it seems, in its essence Christianity is more egalitarian, and martyrdom and suffering are contested especially in the Lutheran tradition of Christianity. Yet, Kierkegaard says: “Christ certainly had followers, and, to take a human example, Socrates also had followers; but neither Christ nor Socrates had followers in the sense” of the crowd, as “ethically-religiously, the crowd is untruth” (PV: 126/SKS 16: 106).

Taking Socrates as his model for interpreting Christ as expecting his imitators to commit to martyrdom and suffering, Kierkegaard often speaks of Christianity as being a way of life that is expressed in radical imitation. Kierkegaard clearly defines the superiority of Christianity over the Socratic, as the latter does not recognize the categories of transcendence and paradox (PF: 55/SKS 4: 258) and mistakenly puts forward the “idealistic thesis that all sin is ignorance” (JP 1: 113/SKS 19: 388, Not 13: 15). Yet, he presents Socrates as properly conceptualizing faith as essentially reduplicating ideals in life:

[Socrates] did not first of all believe by virtue of the proofs and then live; no, his life is the proof and not until his martyr-death is the proof complete. ... Used with discrimination, this may be applied to becoming a Christian.

(JP 1: 73/SKS 23: 51, NB15: 75)

Kierkegaard also renders Socrates to be a teacher who creates students who do not owe him “anything at all!” (PF: 61/SKS 4: 263). This Socratic model is being appropriated by Kierkegaard as his own philosophical-existential task, which he famously describes as being essentially Socratic in his literary production thus:

The only analogy I have before me is Socrates; my task is a Socratic task, to audit the definition of what it is to be a Christian—I do not call myself a Christian (keeping the ideal free), but I can make it manifest that the others are that even less.

(M: 341/SKS 13: 405)

This negative dimension of Kierkegaard’s Socratic task in relation to the creation of followers gains a new light in a murky reference where

Kierkegaard positions himself as the follower of Christ and Socrates in relation to their mode of gaining followers in “Postscript to the ‘Two Notes’” from *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*:

Jesus Christ, to name the supreme example, truth itself, certainly had followers; and, to name a human example, Socrates had followers.

If, then, I seem in one sense to force the ideality of the single individual even higher, how do I understand this? [...] I understand it as my imperfection, because, as I have frequently said, my entire work as an author has also been my own development, in which I myself have ever more deeply concentrated on my idea, my task. But as long as this was my situation, I was not matured enough to be able to draw individuals closer to me, even if I had wanted to.—I understand this as connected with the special nature of my task.

(PV: 125/SKS 16: 105)

Kierkegaard situates his drive to “draw individuals closer to [him]” in relation to the imitative characters of Christ and Socrates and therefore establishes his position as someone who could have followers. Drawing upon what has been established earlier in my analysis, Kierkegaard links this “very special nature of [his] task” with his “Socratic task,” indicating that his own followers, just like those of Socrates and Christ, are single individuals plucked from the “battalions of Christians [who] are not the crowd” (PV: 125–126/SKS 16: 105–106).

Abraham is another of Kierkegaard’s prototypes. He is dubbed “an eternal prototype of the religious man” by Kierkegaard in a journal entry from 1850, roughly seven years after the publication of *Fear and Trembling* (JP 4: 4650/SKS 23: 295, NB18:64). His prototypicality consists in, similarly to Socrates, willingly committing to sacrifice his worldly possessions, security and comfort on account of the unknown. This is also true of “this Pitiful prototype ... the Apostle Peter ... who resembled [Christ] the most” by being “ridiculed, insulted, persecuted, crucified” (CD: 278/SKS 10: 298) and, as Rasmussen indicates, especially by the fact that he “left the certain and chose the uncertain” (Rasmussen 2007: 279). But Peter is also the prototype of doubt, denial, and betrayal, and through that “in other ways he scarcely resembles” Christ (CD: 278/SKS 10: 298; see also Roberts 2010).

Yet, Abraham is more than a prototype of Christian suffering. He is also the prototype of the Christian mode of incognito existence where, while living among his contemporaries, one becomes like an alien among them. Incognito existence is a type of existential movement where one acts in such a way that one is neither perceived as a Christian in an eminent sense nor as a Christian at all by one’s family, friends, and general public. This lack of recognition produces tensions in the genuine

Christian and causes suffering that is hard to recognize from the outside. Kierkegaard states:

Just as [Abraham] had to leave the land of his fathers for a strange land, so the religious man must willingly leave, that is, forsake a whole generation of his contemporaries even though he remains among them, but isolated, *alien* to them.

(JP 4: 4650/SKS 23: 295, NB18: 64)

Abraham's exodus then also prefigures the incognito mode of the suffering of authentic Christians.

Such an image of Abraham is present in *Fear and Trembling* when he is considered to be a knight of faith, one that has true faith, but "looks just like a tax collector" (FT: 39/SKS 4: 133). In contrast to knights of infinite resignation who are "easily recognizable—their walk is light and bold," the knight of faith is hard to come by. Johannes de silentio indicates that the knight of faith passes himself off as someone who entirely enjoys the pleasures of the world to the extent that he can be perceived as the archetype of the bourgeois philistine. He is absolutely consumed by the mimeticism of fashion, new developments in sciences and technology, and crowd behavior: "He enjoys everything he sees, the swarms of people, the new omnibuses, the Sound" (FT: 39/SKS 4: 134). Hence, "if one did not know him, it would be impossible to distinguish him from the rest of the crowd" (FT: 39/SKS 4: 134).

Just like Socrates, who does not teach his students anything but allows himself to be observed and imitated, Abraham as the knight of faith is presented by de silentio as evoking admiration in the observer who then strives to imitate his movements of faith. Speaking of his own attitude toward the knight of faith, de silentio says:

I would not leave him for a second, I would watch him every minute to see how he made the movements; I would consider myself taken care of for life and would divide my time between watching him and practicing myself, and thus spend all my time in admiring him.

(FT: 38/SKS 4: 133)

The word for "practicing" from the quotation is *Øvelser*. It corresponds with the word *Indøvelse* from the title of Anti-Climacus's *Practice in Christianity*. Johannes de silentio's practice prefigures the religious practice key to the Anti-Climacus's understanding of radical Christianity argued in his book. Yet, while Johannes de silentio focuses on the admiration of Abraham and struggles with the subject of his imitation, given that it can be undertaken by someone who "does not have faith" or becomes "unbalanced" (FT: 30–31/SKS 4: 126), Anti-Climacus sees admiration as evasion and imitation as expressive of faith. Still, Anti-Climacus takes

the incognito mode formulated by Johannes de silentio as an important facet of authentic Christianity, calling it “an omnipotently maintained incognito” (PC: 132/SKS: 12: 142).

5.2.2 Job, Girard, and Kierkegaard

With the exception of Abraham, Job is the most referred-to of the figures of the Old Testament in Kierkegaard’s writings. Yet, it comes as no surprise that his reading of Job is unorthodox. The book of Job has been read as a theological debate placed within a folktale. According to René Girard, its general considerations in the scholarly literature distinguish two main renderings: the rewarded patience of Job, or his rebellious disagreement against the injustice of God (1992: 186).³ The first reading sees Job as someone who, while protesting what happens to him, finally concedes to God’s justice and authority. His rebellion is controlled by the narrator and can “be admired without danger because it is mastered in the end ... Job represents patience rewarded” (Girard 1992: 185). The second reading of the story puts God on trial. If Job is in fact innocent, as the book admits, there must be something wrong with this sort of religion. The book of Job is therefore a failed theodicy, and the misfortunes of Job cannot be justified in the light of sincere reflection.

Kierkegaard’s take on the book of Job does not fall under either of these readings. Neither does Girard’s. A presentation of Kierkegaard’s interpretation of Job in parallel with Girard’s will bring into focus a novel reading of the Patriarch as the archetype of an innocent sufferer victimized by his fellow men. Job is then both *figura* and *exemplum* of the victim who suffers at the hand of his people. My reading of Kierkegaard’s appraisal of Job will bring to light his unique reflections on the mimetic dimension of human violence, still largely ignored by scholars, and the solitary nature of unmerited suffering. This sets Kierkegaard as anticipating crucial aspects of Girard’s theory of mimetic desire, but also as a prescriptive model of “dealing with” or “enduring” that suffering, which offers to an individual a unique setting wherein one can gain an unprecedented knowledge of one’s deepest self.

In his reading of the book of Job, Girard notices that the sufferings afflicting Job originate from two sources: from outside and inside his environment. God is the instigator of the suffering that comes from the outside. This interpretation of Job’s misfortune is the go-to theory espoused by the majority of thinkers. Girard is interested in the other type of suffering, namely the misery that afflicts Job but is not commanded by God; it comes from inside his environment and presents Job as suffering at the hands of his people. While Job indeed suffers at the hand of God in the story, Girard notices, he never complains about this fact. It is difficult for Job to agree with the misfortune he experiences from “the outside” but “he complains first of all and above all about the persons surrounding

him, about his relatives, about whoever remains of his family, about his entire village” (Girard 1992: 187). A large part of Job’s misery is caused by those who see him suffering and, following logical reasoning, find him ultimately deserving of it. Job is guilty. What follows is the public condemnation of Job, disapproval of his person, mockery, insults, and ostracism. This social phenomenon of universal punishment represents “the scapegoat mechanism,” and Job is the scapegoat.

For Girard, the book of Job opposes its protagonist to the society that, in its condemnation, turns into a crowd. Even Job’s friends join the mob and eventually contribute to his universal punishment. They fail in their friendship; instead of bringing Job consolation and good advice, they add to the crowd’s persecution. His friends do not attempt to understand him. What should be a conversation between close friends is in fact a perpetual accusation of Job by his friends set against Job’s numerous attempts to explain and defend himself. Job’s friends join the collective judgment on him and in that sense form a unanimous alliance, the mob’s concept of truth, which constitutes the scapegoat mechanism. Girard says:

Beginning at the moment that the persecution acquires a collective character, it exercises an irresistible attraction upon those who in principle should remain faithful to the victim and support him in his distress—his relatives, his wife, his intimate friends, his domestic animals.

(Girard 1992: 189)

The fortune or misfortune of an individual dictates their position in society, as it is through one’s prosperity or lack thereof that society decides on one’s place within it. *Vox populi vox Dei*, cries Girard. The voice of the people is the voice of God, and, conversely, the voice of God is the voice of the people. This brings us, as Girard claims, to Oedipus of Sophocles, where the god who agrees with a decision of the crowd is the god of Greek tragedy. Like Oedipus, Job experiences a high position within his social environment while successful, and exactly the reverse while in misfortune and suffering.

Yet, Job is very different from Oedipus. He “understands [the victimary mechanism] because he is the victim of this mechanism, but in contrast to so many other victims, he does not accept the verdict that condemns him” and he does not submit to the decision of the crowd (Girard 1992: 202). He reaches for the accusatory language of his failed friends and convinces the reader that the crowd made him into their scapegoat. Job’s contemporaries need to victimize him to restore the harmony that has been violated by his misfortunes; his scapegoating will make them feel good about themselves, and, paradoxically, after his death Job’s figure will be divinized by his persecutors (Girard 1992: 196).⁴

Kierkegaard first raises the subject of Job in his pseudonymous work *Repetition*. The Young Man who wants to understand the nature of “repetition” turns to Job, instead of looking among the established thinkers of the ancient and modern times, and of his contemporaries (R: 186/SKS 4: 57).⁵ The Young Man decides to search for the answers from Job over professional philosophers, established thinkers such as Hegel, and surprisingly, over ancient intellectuals, like Socrates. Hegel was a fundamental point of departure for Kierkegaard in his philosophy, and, as I have just established, as his model the Dane chose Socrates. Yet, the Young Man finds in the figure of Job what he seeks for. The “little circle of Job and his wife and three friends” is more accurate in presenting the true nature of “repetition” than agora and academia. That distinction between those two platforms, and the valuation of the former over the latter, when it comes to the presentation and understanding of existential truth, can be particularly evident when we read Kierkegaard’s rendering of Job more holistically. This is not an easy task because, as Edward Mooney suggests, Kierkegaard distributed the portrait of Job over several works (1993: 151).

Published in parallel to *Repetition*, “The Lord Gave, and the Lord Took Away; Blessed be the Name of the Lord” from *Four Upbuilding Discourses* from 1843 instantly brings into one’s mind Job’s famous *dictum*. This essay explains in greater detail the exceptionality of Job. Therein, Kierkegaard calls Job a “teacher and guide of humankind” (EUD: 109, 112/SKS 5: 115–116, 117–118) and justifies his claim by saying that his “significance by no means consists in what he said but in what he did” (EUD: 109/SKS 5: 115). His extraordinariness consists in a form of existential integrity where Job acts according to his words. Without that undertaking, which Kierkegaard dubs “acting in asserting,” what Job says has little to no meaning.

Job’s acting precisely consisted in acceptance of the suffering that came upon him at the hand of God. At first Job was a wealthy man and a respected figure in his society, but also a happy family man of good health. While prosperous, he naturally expressed his joy, but while misfortune bore down on him, he behaved naturally as well in expressing his anxiety and sadness, albeit without succumbing to despair. Kierkegaard says, “Having surrendered to sorrow, not in despair but with human emotions, he was quick to judge between God and himself, and these are the words of judgment; ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return’” (EUD: 115/SKS 5: 120). Job’s perception of his misfortune is not focused on his innocence, but on God’s sovereignty. What Kierkegaard notices is that Job utters in his latter judgment “*The Lord gave, and the Lord took away; blessed be the name of the Lord,*” and this statement facilitates the dispute over his misfortune (EUD: 114/SKS 5: 120).

Job’s life has a dialectical character that extends its influence on the ensuing generations. On the one hand, Job has completed the part of the

task of being faithful to God in suffering during his life. On the other hand, Job accompanies each generation of those who, in a similar manner to Job, go through the sufferings of life. Kierkegaard says:

When one generation has finished its service, completed its work, fought through its struggle, Job has accompanied it; when the new generation with its incalculable ranks, each individual in his place, stands ready to begin the pilgrimage, Job is there again, takes place, which is the outpost of humanity.

(EUD: 110/SKS 5: 116)

Apart from being a companion in suffering, Kierkegaard calls him a teacher of humanity. Similarly to Socrates, Job desires to have followers and is a kind of a teacher; yet in contrast to Socrates, Job does not construct any particular teaching that would consist of a system of beliefs or a theory (such as the theory of the immortality of the soul in Socrates). His narrative does not even include, as one could expect, some kind of theodicy; God is neither justified nor denounced. What matters for Kierkegaard is that Job's teaching is identical with his actions, or in fact, that his teaching is comprised of his actions. In that Job redoubles and reduplicates. In his "Kierkegaard's Job Discourse," Mooney reaffirms this thought, indicating that Job, as a teacher without a doctrinal teaching, is one of those who teach "by being themselves particulars so meaning-laden as to be prototypes for later generations" (1993: 155).

Girard's reading of Job's suffering zooms in primarily on the mimetic and collective origins of his suffering, furthering the anthropology of mimetic desire of the French thinker. Kierkegaard does not relinquish the theological dimension of the story, because Job's prototypical trial at the hand of God is an important motive that shapes the complex image of religious existence. So understood, for Kierkegaard, Job is the example of suffering existence who seeks in their suffering an opportunity to get close to God and to be himself truly in that suffering. Yet, the social dimension of the suffering of the Old Testament figure discloses the role of violence in Kierkegaard's political and social thought. In that sense two journal entries bring both thinkers closer by emphasizing the role of human violence in the story of Job. Commenting on the book of Job, Kierkegaard jots an entry which criticizes the human propensity to formulate careless and "cruel" sweeping judgments such as equating unhappiness with wrongdoing. These formulations are a form of violence that we exert on others.

The significance of this book is really to show the cruelty which we men commit by interpreting being unhappy as guilt, as crime. This is essentially human selfishness, which desires to avoid the earnest and disturbing impression of suffering, of what can happen to a man

in this life—therefore in order to protect ourselves against this we explain suffering as guilt: It is his own fault. O, human cruelty!

Job is concerned with proving himself right, in a certain sense also in relation to God, but above all in relation to his friends, who instead of consoling him torment him with the thesis that he suffers because of guilt.

(JP 2: 1536/SKS 24: 415, NB24: 143)

This journal entry shows a strongly Girardian tone of the violence. It is seen in Kierkegaard's assessment of Job's failed friends, who mistake his underserved suffering for one that results from a sense of guilt, which stems from wrongdoing. Kierkegaard observes here that the suffering of the single individual is often perceived as part of their guilt, which is also analogous to Girard's understanding. Job has to justify himself not before God—before whom the single individual, as Kierkegaard says, is always in the wrong—but before friends. Additionally, this quote shows that his friends contribute to the suffering he experiences. Instead of soothing his pain, they condemn him and amplify his misery. Suffering at the hands of other men is taken by Kierkegaard toward the end of his writing to be an essential part of spiritual growth. When we suffer, we flourish spiritually. He remarks in 1854: “Man is of such intended nature that the kind of suffering which is predominantly the suffering ‘from men’ is part of becoming spirit” (JP 1: 86/SKS 26: 56, NB31: 73).

Lastly, Job's example demonstrates something important about the alienation and solitude of suffering. In suffering, the single individual is always alone in two ways. First, there is no room for any companionship while suffering at the hand of God because the intimate relation between God and the single individual that unfolds in suffering is absolutely exclusive. One is naked, or, as Kierkegaard phrases it, transparent, for one stands before what is of absolute importance to the single individual—their relation to eternity. Second, the intervention of the other can only disturb one's experience of what is the merit of suffering: being close to oneself while being before God. As Kierkegaard says: “Job endured everything—not until his friends came to comfort him—did he become impatient” (SKS 21: 317, NB 10: 115; *my translation*).

5.2.3 “The Woman Who Was a Sinner”

Kierkegaard dedicates two pieces of his signed writings to the New Testament figure of the woman from Luke 7:36–50, the last of *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* from 1849 and *An Upbuilding Discourse* from 1850. Both works have “The Woman Who Was a Sinner [Synderinden]” as their subtitles. The figure of the so-called “woman who was a sinner” is another example of Kierkegaard's derivative prototype. Kierkegaard presents her as a model of piety for imitation for would-be

Christians. Her exemplarity pertains to her humility expressed in her low regard of herself while facing Christ and the unfavorable crowd of judgmental Pharisees. Her radical humbleness is represented in words: “She hated herself: she loved much” (WA: 138/SKS 11: 274). Analogously to Job, she is the teacher of humankind by virtue of what she did and not what she said; we read that “[the woman who was a sinner] says nothing and therefore is not what she says, but she is what she does not say, or what she does not say is what she is” (WA: 141/SKS 11: 277).

In that sense, we are not learning from the woman about the tenets or requirements of Christianity, but we are learning through her exemplarity Christian piety demonstrated in her life. She exemplifies the appropriate mode of relating to Christ. She is an exemplar in the Kantian sense embedded in his concept of *Nachfolge*, which, as I have indicated in previous chapters, has a motivational character. This means that “the woman who was a sinner” demonstrates the “doability” or “fulfillability” of the Christian ideal of piety by epitomizing it in her action. And indeed, “as a teacher, as a prototype of piety [*som Lærer, som Forbillede*]” (WA: 149/SKS 12: 263) “[sh]e is the symbol, like a picture [*hun er Betegnelsen, som et Billede*]” (WA: 141/SKS 11: 277). She becomes a special type of an image, a sign that points beyond herself to something else.

Kierkegaard portrays the woman as “a guide ... on [the] path” to the Communion table, which represents a special moment in the Christian faith that ponders the nature of the Eucharist (WA: 144/SKS 11: 280). As such, “she walks there in the lead” (WA: 144/SKS 11: 280) and one must not abstain from “following her [*følge hende*]” if one wants to be successful in genuine communion with God (WA: 138/SKS 11: 275). Genuine communion with God is warranted by one’s attitude and ability to disregard one’s numerous concerns to what is of the ultimate concern and focusing on it before God. “The woman who was a sinner” is the example of someone who lost herself in Christ as Savior and in doing so, like Abraham, she let go of everything that was precious to her. She turned everything in her world into nothing, including herself. Anything she is concerned with becomes trivial (“everything temporal, earthly, and worldly, honors, esteem, prosperity, the future, relatives, friends, people’s opinion”; WA: 153/SKS 12: 267), but one concern remains: the weight of her sins. She seeks forgiveness for her sins, and this is precisely what a Christian should learn from someone whose identity is coined in reference to sin as that of “the woman who was a sinner.” “The woman who was a sinner” stands as a model who reminds that Christians are helpless with respect to their need for forgiveness, hence she can “help” them navigate the path toward it (WA: 153/SKS 12: 267).

By dubbing “the woman who was a sinner” with the property of being a picture, or, as he says elsewhere, being “changed into a picture” by Christ, Kierkegaard alters the identity of the woman from a character from Luke’s Gospel to an assertion, an argument, an icon or a figure of

speech. Similar to Niobe, who by means of her eternal mourning signifies grief and grieving after an absolute loss, the woman who was a sinner becomes “the woman who was a sinner” for Kierkegaard. Through her actions, she embodies the prototypicality of the signified property. He says, “This woman was a sinner—yet she became and is a prototype” (WA: 142–143/SKS 11: 279). Following on from what I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, “the woman who was a sinner” represents an *exemplum*, by virtue of her both tragic and heroic action. In that, she also corresponds with another prototype of Christian existence, the figure of the lily and the bird dubbed by Kierkegaard as “the metaphor,” which is the Hongs’ translation of the Danish *Billedet*, which literally means “the image” (WA: 32/SKS 11: 36).

By attributing to the woman the property of being an image, Kierkegaard does more than linking a particular understanding of image with his notion of prototypes; this idea has been sufficiently elaborated by Ettore Rocca (1999) in his “Kierkegaard’s Second Aesthetics,” where he argues that every such *Billedet* is in its representative sense, a *Forbilledet*. Kierkegaard also points to a certain indirectness of imitation. That is to say, we cannot have a direct grasp of either of the proposed prototypes, including Christ; rather, our relationship to them is and must be indirect and “mediated” through something else, that is, in Kierkegaard’s particular rendering of a mediative image. Moreover, as I will discuss in more detail in the last chapter, these images themselves constitute a form of mediation, as they communicate something that is only intimated in them, but in fact remains beyond them.

For Kierkegaard, Christ engages the woman as “the woman who was a sinner” to show to the Pharisees and also to the contemporary reader that what is at stake is their own life, not the life of that very woman or anyone else. Although it appears that He depersonalizes her, Christ in fact renders her as a living example of how He should be approached, not a sheer instance of it; it is she who lends herself at Christ’s feet “like a picture.” Her example is not something distant and unattainable to the follower, but that which can and should be applied in one’s own life.

Apprehension of her role as the prototype is not optional, but required; she is a guide to Christ and must be followed (WA: 144/SKS 11:280). This thought, surprising coming from a Lutheran thinker, means that a would-be Christian must model his attitude toward Christ on her. While it is clearly stated throughout Kierkegaard’s writings that to be a Christian one must imitate Christ, yet the key to the *how* of the imitation of Christ is in the piety exemplified in “the woman who was a sinner.” Kierkegaard states that considering Christ “as the prototype, no human being can hold out with him entirely; they all fall away, even the apostles” (WA: 159/SKS 12: 272). What is unique about Christ is that his standards are impossible to meet and thus he is *the* prototype; yet, as I will demonstrate toward the end of this chapter, on its own, Christ does not offer us

all that is necessary to follow Him truly. For that we need such figures as the woman who was a sinner, who, nameless, is an eternal picture; or, as Kierkegaard says elsewhere, an anonymous picture:

The prototypes [*Forbillederne*] are anonymous, or eternal images [Billeder]: “the tax collector [Tolderen]” “the woman who was a sinner [Synderinden]”—a name distracts so easily, merely sets tongues wagging, so that one comes to forget himself. The anonymous prototype constrains a person to think of himself insofar as this can be done.

(JP 2: 1856/SKS 22: 244, NB12: 167; translation modified)

Her guidance is of a peculiar sort. It requires concentrating on one thought, one wish, and one sorrow. She forgot herself, ignored her abilities in being a moral person, but also stopped concentrating on her wrongdoings and focused on Christ. Her primary merit is that her many sins were forgiven and still “Blessed is the one who resembles her [*ligner hende*] in loving much!” (WA: 143/SKS 11: 279).

As an anonymous prototype, on the one hand, she can be imitated by an individual who in the very act of imitation is not distracted by the actual person who stands behind “the woman who was a sinner.” On the other hand, the fact that we do not know her name secures us from seeking excuses to concentrate on anything but ourselves, for Kierkegaard. As a prototype for imitation, she is not what Kierkegaard calls “a forbidding picture,” which is something unattainable yet also random or contingent (WA: 144/SKS 11: 280). “On the contrary, she is more inciting than all rhetorical incitements,” meaning that a particularly defined example, model, prototype—yet not a real historical person—works much better for Kierkegaard than any abstract and instructive text filled with admonition and persuasive reasoning (WA: 144/SKS 11: 280).⁶

5.3 Internal Mimetic Models

5.3.1 *From Ideal Self to the Ideal Picture of Being a Christian*

As initially indicated, *Forbilledede* designates a perfected or ideal representation of someone or something. In the previous sections, I elaborated the mimetic dimension of Kierkegaard’s religious *Forbillederne*. These prototypes are for the most part external to the imitator. Kierkegaard also devises a number of internal mimetic models that represent an ideal self. These idealized accounts of the self culminate in Kierkegaard’s “ideal picture of being a Christian,” representing the religious model, but are also strongly present in his idealized vision of “the single individual” that consists of both the religious and nonreligious. Throughout his writings Kierkegaard uses the term “ideal” [*Idealet*] in various senses (cf. JP 3:

3536/SKS 26: 122, NB32: 6). Some correspond with the Platonic understanding of the ideals as transcendent, complete, and immutable, or their Aristotelian appraisal as dynamic, entailing perfection, inseparable from their actual realizations; others suggest their regulative character is more reminiscent of Kant (cf. JP 1: 236/SKS 21: 286, NB10: 57; and JP 1: 852/SKS 27: 163, Papir 224).

Yet, I will not refer to “the ideals” in a sense that explicitly argues for any of the previously stated positions, but in the sense entailed in Kierkegaard describing himself as “an unauthorized poet who influences by means of the ideals” (FSE: 21/SKS 13: 50). So understood, “the ideal” is linked with “ideality” [*Idealiteten*], which designates certain desired states or structures of actuality; examples of that are “the ideality of being human” sought by Socrates (JP 2: 1767/SKS 26: 363, NB35: 2) or the “ideality [God] has established for being a Christian” (JP 2: 1449/SKS 26:303, NB33: 55).⁷ Apart from the fact that the ideal (and ideality) refers to the relation between possibility and actuality, it also has an existential dimension that requires an individual to represent the ideal—one ought to “present the ideal higher than one himself is existentially” (JP2: 1470/SKS 22: 357, NB14: 23).

The ideal self represents a model of the self for imitation. Though Kierkegaard clearly states that the true model for imitation is Christ, I contend that together with his (poetic) presentation of Christ as the ideal model for imitation, he simultaneously presents “the single individual” and “the ideal picture of being a Christian” as mimetic models representative of ideal selfhood in Kierkegaard. These two interrelated notions—which as such signify a philosophical self and a Christian self—I categorize as “the means of the ideals” with which Kierkegaard attempts to “influence” his fellowmen. In *For Self-Examination* from 1851, Kierkegaard contrasts a poet with a believer. A poet can describe faith, but this ability does not make him a believer (JFY: 18/SKS 13: 47). Like Johannes de silentio who can “describe the movements of faith, but [he] cannot make them” (FT: 37/SKS 4: 132), calling himself a poet, Kierkegaard has the ability to describe the ideals; however, he does not represent them.

The category of “the single individual” is used widely by Kierkegaard throughout his texts.⁸ “The single individual” is an elevated template for existence designed as every man’s *telos* (JP 2: 1531/SKS 23: 114, NB16: 32). It represents a self with a certain level of consciousness that, in due course, “equips” an individual to relate to God (SUD: 79, 85, 119/SKS 11: 193; 198–199; 230–231). The single individual is exempted from the crowd and is the intended “dear reader” of Kierkegaard’s works (PV: 9–11/SKS 13: 13–17). The single individual is also some sort of an upshot of Kierkegaard’s production—as Kierkegaard’s reader, the single individual will bring awakening into Christendom (JP2: 2014/Pap. IX B 66). The culmination of Kierkegaard’s appreciation of the concept of

the single individual we find in one of his late journal entries from 1854 that reveals the religious dimension of this notion. He remarks: “the New Testament criterion for being human is to be a single individual” (JP 2: 1802/SKS 25: 343, NB29: 81), and “[God] wants men as single individuals” (JP 2: 1825/Pap. XI-3 B 199). In *The Sickness unto Death*, “the single individual” represents a normative requirement for religious existence as a human being becomes a singular sinner as the single individual. Without the category of the single individual (a philosophical self), there is no category of the ideal Christian (a Christian self) (SUD: 119/SKS 11: 230–231; cf. JP 2: 1781/SKS 22: 299, NB12: 103).

Although it changes over the course of his writings, Kierkegaard eventually defines “the ideal Christian” more as a task than as a concept. Just like the ideal self of the single individual, Kierkegaard develops the religious ideal throughout his authorship mostly in his journals and in the writings written toward the end of his life. An association of the terms “ideal” and “Christian” appears in a journal entry from 1848, where Kierkegaard relates the words in two subsequent quotes. The first quote says: “The situation is that the ideal [*Idealet*] must necessarily suffer, succumb, become a sacrifice in this world” (JP1: 964/SKS 21: 152, NB 8: 17), and the following quote rephrases the preceding one in the manner of replacing “the ideal” with “the essentially Christian, the true Christian” which follows: “That the essentially Christian, the true Christian, must become a sacrifice in the world is easy to see in the manner in which everybody ... ought to go in practical life” (JP1: 965/SKS 21: 164, NB8: 43). Both quotes are summarized with another following part of the entry, which explicitly links ideality with actuality: “Christianity means that the ideal and ideality [*Idealet og Idealiteten*] must be kept alive in practical life.” In stating this, Kierkegaard does not refer to his preferences about the requirements for being a Christian; on the contrary, he states that “the ideal qualifications for being a Christian” have been established by God. As he modifies this thought later on, becoming, a Christian “is an examination given by God [that is] continually difficult” and the true Christian is the one who is a martyr (JP1: 481/SKS 20: 392, NB 5: 48).

As shown earlier, both “the single individual” and “the ideal Christian” are not value-neutral concepts but represent a certain meaning-laden ideality and a “pregnant” potentiality. There is a deliberate design to their structures, and they feature a particular set of requirements that is not arbitrary. They are mimetic models of the ideal self that require existential re-presentations, existential redoubling. In the sense of *figura* and *exemplum*, “the single individual” and “the ideal Christian” are also “images” and “signs” that refer to something more than they are themselves, which is a particular “reality” they communicate and that is hidden “beyond” them.

The absolutely foundational role of ideality of the single individual for Christian existence is discussed in relation to imitation in a journal note

from 1851 entitled “Imitation [*Efterfølgelsen*].” This entry further explicates the philosophical-mimetic foundations of Kierkegaard’s religious project of existence in reference to a model. Imitation is described here at work in “making men into single individuals,” which, in effect, guards Christianity against it being made into either a doctrine or spectacle:

If “imitation [*Efterfølgelsen*]” is not applied at least minimally in order dialectically to maintain justice and to set the relationship in order—namely, that Christianity involves the single individual, every single individual, who must relate himself to the ideal [*Idealet*], even though it only means humbly to admit how infinitely far behind it he is—then the “race” has taken over and Christianity is mythology, poetry, and the preaching of Christianity is theatrical, for the guarantee of distinction between theatre and Church is “imitation [*Efterfølgelsen*],” its earnestness, and the sobriety involved in making men into single individuals, so that every single individual relates himself, is obliged to relate himself, to the ideal [*Idealet*].

(JP 2: 1904/SKS 24: 386, NB24: 105)

What is so distinctive of the whole entry is that, although he explicitly states in its earlier part that the ideal is “Christ ... the prototype,” Kierkegaard does not concentrate on that understanding of the ideal, but rather stresses the contrast between “making men into single individuals” and what he calls “the race” in relation to “the ideal.” Put differently, although Kierkegaard designates Christ as the ideal in this fragment, his main goal appears to stress the human relationship to the ideal understood in a more philosophical way, not in the theological-religious way that would explain or entail in more detail the Christo-logical dimension of that relationship.

This philosophical stress on imitation is also at work in Kierkegaard’s dialectical approach to the subject of imitation in the same passage. Imitation is both conditioned and conditions “the single individual.” On the one hand, imitation here is considered as an individuating “force” that makes people into “single individuals”; on the other hand, “the single individual’s” relation to the ideal upholds imitation and secures the genuineness of Christianity. This dialectical approach to imitation suggested in this entry (and two other closely related journal entries: JP 2: 1904/SKS 24: 384–385, NB24: 105; and JP 2: 1905/SKS 24: 393–340, NB24: 115) emphasizes the fact that the Christian self is in desperate need of grace, but imitation also points to the fact that what is expected from the would-be Christian is subjective engagement in the process of individuation fundamental to a philosophical self. Moreover, the single individual and ideal Christian, as models of the ideal self, allow an individual to relate to the ideal, through which one becomes a genuine human being.

The process of becoming the ideal self in imitation of the ideal self is to be found in the “movement of the ideal” that Kierkegaard calls the “motion”. This harkens back to the movements of faith exercised by the knight of faith from *Fear and Trembling*. Kierkegaard says:

In the highest sense “motion” is the movement of the ideal [*Idealets Bevægelse*]¹—and this separates men absolutely, makes them single individuals and makes every single individual introspective, so that he has enough to do with himself—but then not the slightest uproar arises.

(JP 2: 1790/SKS 24: 54, NB21: 82)

Through the movement of the ideal, an individual becomes the single individual that one in fact is in potentiality. What separates the single individual from other men in an absolute qualitative way makes the single individual aware of the ideal through one’s depreciation of the relative values based on comparison and social consensus that lead to mediocrity.

From the awareness of the ideal’s ideality comes “understanding” of the ideal, which Kierkegaard sees in one’s desire for self-emaciation (JP 2: 1791/SKS 24: 54, NB21: 83). Yet, this self-emaciation (one’s “own destruction”) is only a part of the dialectical process of the individual’s striving to appropriate the ideal. It results from the fact that by getting closer to the ideal, one sees more clearly the vastness of the gap between one’s factuality and the ideal; Kierkegaard calls this advancement “progress is retrogression” (JP 2: 1789/SKS 24: 47, NB21: 67). The positive aspect of this dialectics of the appropriation of the ideal is, paradoxically, measured in one’s growing alienation from the crowd of others.

5.3.2 “*The ideal picture of being a Christian*” and *Mellembestemmelserne*

“The single individual,” “the ideal self,” and “the ideal Christian” are combined in Kierkegaard’s unique type of an internal prototype, namely “the ideal picture of being a Christian.” This mimetic model is not simply a synergistic incorporation of the internal philosophical and religious *Forbillederne* into an extra prototype; it stands for Kierkegaard’s unconventional way of solving the problem of the prototype that represents an idealized existence for humans understood as beings in the process of becoming. This heterodoxy on the part of Kierkegaard suggests that, in his view, Christ as the prototype is not sufficient with respect to guiding would-be Christians to successfully imitating Him. My presentation and interpretation of “the ideal picture of being a Christian” furthers the main argument of this chapter about the plurality of mimetic models engaged by Kierkegaard in his writings. It also unfolds a more complex nature of his interest in mimesis than has been argued to date in

the literature. That said, “the ideal picture of being a Christian” stands for Kierkegaard’s rather unfinished project that raises questions that still need to be answered.

Suffering from a limited elaboration on the part of Kierkegaard, “the ideal picture of being a Christian” has received relatively little attention from scholars. Steven M. Emmanuel notably interprets the ideal picture as being synonymous with “the life and person of Christ” (1996: 117) who is “the ideal pattern and object of faith” (1996: 140). Hence, Emmanuel interprets Kierkegaard’s introduction of the image as tantamount with his need to reintroduce the requirement of the imitation of Christ into Christianity. Mark A. Tietjen reads “the ideal picture of being a Christian” as Kierkegaard’s “modernized” form of Christian existence, namely witnessing (2013: 56–57). Both thinkers interpret Kierkegaard’s move as necessitated by his appraisal of compromised Christendom in modernity. While these interpretations are consistent with Kierkegaard’s overall thought, there is only so much that supports them in the work that discusses “the ideal picture of being a Christian,” namely *Armed Neutrality*.

Disagreeing with their lines of thought, then, I claim that “the ideal picture of being a Christian” is not reintroduced but produced by Kierkegaard to respond to his novel conceptualization of a Christian as a being in becoming. So understood, the picture is not synonymous with Christ but acts as His “support” in guiding the modern Christian on the path to genuine being that occurs in their becoming. In that regard, the picture accounts for that which is missing from Christ the pattern but is needed for a successful Christian existence.

Armed Neutrality presents “the ideal picture of being a Christian” as the most fundamental aspect of Kierkegaard’s production. This work, never published during his life and indeed published posthumously as one of the last from his oeuvre, after denouncing the fact that its author is not “a Christian to an extraordinary degree,” opens with a statement that sheds an important light on Kierkegaard’s authorship:

But what I have wanted and want to *achieve* through my work, what I also regard as the most important, is first of all to make clear what is involved in being a Christian, to present the picture of a Christian in all its ideal, that is, true form, worked out to every true limit, submitting myself even before any other to be judged by this picture, whatever the judgment is, or more accurately, precisely this judgment—that I do not resemble [*ligner*] this picture.

(PV: 129/SKS 16: 111)

“The ideal picture” is something that Kierkegaard’s authorship was meant to “present” or, as he says a few lines later, produce (“*at bringe frem dette ideale Billede frem*”), in such a way that the image would not be compromised by the author himself. If the image were to be tantamount with

Christ the Prototype, one could wonder what motivated Kierkegaard to emphasize the fact that he does not resemble it. The word used for resemblance is “*ligner*,” which suggests that, as he stands, Kierkegaard does not conform to the image, yet this does not mean that he does not strive to imitate the image in his attempts to reduplicate it in life. From this, it is becoming clearer that the image represents a mode of Christian existence that imitates Christ, not Christ the Prototype.

The intended difference between “the ideal picture of being a Christian” and Christ the Prototype is laid down by the author a few lines below where “the ideal picture” is equated with the expression “the middle terms [*Mellembestemmelserne*],” which stands for an important element for the modern existence of a Christian, and yet one that is missing from the Bible. While the New Testament presents Christ as the prototype, it shows Him in elemental perfection, what Kierkegaard terms a presentation “in being” not “in becoming”; what the modern man needs is a model of Christian becoming.

Jesus Christ, it is true, is himself the prototype, and will continue to be that, unchanged, until the end. But Christ is also much more than the prototype; he is the object of faith. In Holy Scriptures he is presented chiefly as such, and this explains why he is presented more in being than in becoming, or actually is presented only in being, or why the middle terms [*Mellembestemmelserne*] are lacking—something that everyone has indeed ascertained who, even though humbly and adoringly, has earnestly sought to order his life according to his example.

(PV: 131/SKS 16: 113)

This quotation provides an important insight into the complexity of Kierkegaard’s appraisal of exemplarity, including the nature of Christ’s prototypicality. It also pushes us to rethink the role of Christ in becoming a Christian, the relationship between being and becoming in imitation, and the nature of the imitator. Four things come to the fore.

First, the Scripture presents Christ as in *being*, not as in *becoming*, because Christ’s essence is already given; Christ does not need to become something different from what He *already* is. This corresponds with the nature of the lily and the bird who, as I have argued elsewhere, are what they are, and cannot change into something else. The situation is different with a Christian, as the essence of a Christian is their becoming what they really are; being a Christian is becoming one, and becoming a Christian means to be a Christian. This “decisive qualification in being a Christian is according to a dialectic or is on the other side of a dialectic” (PV: 130/SKS 16: 112), says Kierkegaard, bemoaning the modern philosophical-theological speculation that merges two sides of the dialectical take on Christian existence or emphasizing one at the expense of the other. As Kierkegaard reads Christ as presented only in being in the

Bible, he responds to that “shortcoming” with a normative model that accounts for “becoming” of a Christian by means of “the middle terms [*Mellembestemmelserne*].” “The middle terms” stand for what is essentially Christian, that is, a representation of a human being in the process of becoming. To sum up, it seems that for Kierkegaard becoming a Christian requires more than solely relying on the mimetic model of Christ.

Second, “the ideal picture of being a Christian” is Kierkegaard’s “invention.” The picture is not a theological or exegetical concept derived from the Bible. On the contrary, it is a theoretical construct established by the author to account for something about which the Bible itself is silent. He calls it “a human interpretation” that accommodates a new conceptualization of the human being but also corrects numerous errors introduced into Christianity by modernity. The picture is able to grasp the dynamic dimension of human existence, because, as Kierkegaard clarifies further down, it “contains all the middle terms [*Mellembestemmelserne*] pertaining to derivatives and casts everything into becoming” (PV: 131/SKS 16: 113). On the one hand, “the ideal picture of being a Christian” equips Kierkegaard with the means to discuss and communicate the ideal (“the dialectical, pathos filled (in the various forms of pathos), the psychological, modernized by continual reference to modern Christendom and to the fallacies of a science and scholarship” (PV: 131/SKS 16: 113); on the other, it “makes” becoming a Christian possible.

It is not surprising to observe that such an interpretation is problematic in relation to Christ the Prototype and the imitation of Christ as Christian requirements. Anticipating this, Kierkegaard states that Christ the Prototype and the ideal picture do not exclude each other but remain in tension. The ideal we find in Christ is complete and unchangeable, while “the ideal picture of being a Christian” is dynamic and open. Rendered “in relation to Christ as the prototype ... the ideal picture of being a Christian ... is a human interpretation” (PV: 132/SKS 16: 114).

Third, Christ is not a Christian. Becoming a genuine Christian was not the goal of his dwelling on Earth. He is not a human being as we are, hence, our imitation of Christ will not make us into Christians. This seems like a radical thesis. The key to its understanding lies in Kierkegaard’s repeated references, in various iterations, to Christ as “much more than the prototype” (PV: 131/SKS 16: 113), his insistence that Christ is “Not a Direct Prototype for a Human Being [*ikke er ligefrem Forbilledligt for et Menneske*]” (JP2: 1921/SKS 25: 201, NB27:86), and his firm and clear distinction between Christ’s nature as presented in the Bible only in *being* and human nature in the process of *becoming*. How can one possibly become a genuine Christian in their becoming by imitating Christ whose essence is in His being?

Two examples illustrate this supposition: representational painting and chivalry. In representational painting, we assume a correspondence between the painting and the painted object, the model. If a painter

paints an object, let's say a piece of fruit, the painting itself should have an essential reference to that object; this is because we assume a certain correspondence between the painting and the fruit. Hence, if the painting presented a person, we would question the effect of the painter's work. One cannot simply take a piece of fruit as a model and paint a person. Returning to our problem of the imitation of Christ, if Christ is not a human being, let alone a Christian, we cannot presume that the imitation of Christ will make humans or Christians of us. Christ is "completely different from me, qualitatively different from me ... [a] superhuman being [*overmenneskeligt Væsen*]," says Kierkegaard in a journal entry (JP1: 83/SKS 26: 23, NB31: 30).

The example of chivalry in Girard's exposition of mimetic desire (1966: 1–10) offers another important angle on the problem with the imitation of Christ in Kierkegaard. Girard takes Amadis of Gaul as the model of chivalry. The idea is that Don Quixote's imitation of Amadis of Gaul allows him to have a real grasp of the very ideal the latter embodies. As I argue, the parallel between Christ and Amadis of Gaul is illusory. Contrary to Amadis of Gaul, who actually is a knight-errant, Christ is not a Christian. By imitating Amadis of Gaul, Don Quixote becomes a knight-errant. What seems to be decisive here when we relate it to Kierkegaard is that "the ideal image of being a Christian" is not Christ, but an ideal Christian. Christ is not a Christian, He is a God-man; He is an image of God.

Lastly, "the ideal picture of being a Christian" is not something established once and for all. The picture must be presented in each generation anew and the recurrent presentation must be "modified" "in relation to the errors of the times" (PV: 133/SKS 16: 115). This would mean that the image changes. His hope with regard to what he calls "new modifications [*nye Modificationer*]" or "the modifications [*Modificationerne*]" (PV: 131/SKS 16: 113) is that they will guard the image against two types of mimeticism: the novelty of fashion ("against the new nonsense that is now in vogue") and self-idolization "in order to pick up some adherents" (PV: 131-3/SKS 16: 113–115). The ultimate importance of presenting "the ideal picture of being a Christian" exceeds Kierkegaard's task of presenting the picture in his particular times, or, so to speak, for his contemporaries. Yet in doing so, Kierkegaard perceives himself as someone unique, a kind of "reformer."

5.3.3 *Kierkegaard as a Negative Prototype*

Kierkegaard's presentation of the ideal picture in *Armed Neutrality* is warranted by his ardent insistence that he is not the picture or that he does not conform to its standards. Apart from stipulating how the picture must be communicated, this negative self-assessment on the part of the thinker paradoxically demonstrates that by submitting to its standards,

Kierkegaard indeed presents it correctly. Consequently, there is a kind of dialectical positivity in the negativity qualifying these statements. His negative self-presentation sets a standard that must be adhered to when “the ideal picture of being a Christian” is presented to every generation, presumably, after Kierkegaard; he does not identify a single person succeeding in that regard among his contemporaries. His negative self-presentation forms a backdrop for his appraisal and exposition of genuine Christian existence more specifically and a meaningful existence more broadly. This is the case in the previously discussed *Armed Neutrality*, where he notoriously invokes the category of being “without authority,” but also in a number of other places. It evolves throughout his authorship reaching surprisingly radical tones focused on denouncing show-offs and deceivers. I take such self-assessments as representing a negative mimetic model in Kierkegaard. By no means do I take Kierkegaard’s prototypical negativity as somehow coherently presented in his writings. It changes.

Negativity is here understood dialectically. It does not mean a bad moral or religious exemplar, as in the case of Kierkegaard’s valuation of academic pen-pushers and scoundrel theologians of his times. On the one hand, as a negative mimetic model, Kierkegaard brings to the fore the ideal quality of the matters that he is arguing for, ranging from the ideality of Christian existence to singular living. On the other hand, negativity means here Kierkegaard’s positioning himself in such a way in relation to the communicated subject that the focus is maximally on the subject, not on the communicator. Negativity should then be understood here in the sense of a negative photographic image from which the photographer eventually develops the actual picture. The darkest areas on a negative illuminate the brightest areas on the developed image.

As a negative prototype, Kierkegaard relates himself dialectically to “the picture of the ideal Christian.” The ideality of the image is negatively mirrored in the communicator’s vocal pronouncements of his failing with regard to resembling the ideal picture. Through his awareness of the failing, Kierkegaard is able to truly understand the ideality of genuine human existence. Yet, this self-assessment seems to be for the most part directed at the leaders of the Danish Lutheran Church, influenced by German speculative thought, who are dramatically at odds with the image; more so than Kierkegaard, who Socratically is closer to the image by virtue of being aware of his shortcomings.

Both realizations legitimize Kierkegaard in establishing himself as a prototype who is “*without authority*.” This renunciation of authority is an essential element of his poetic mode of communication where, on the one hand, he is honest about the high bar of ideality, but also about not measuring up to these standards. On the other hand, Kierkegaard “has ... nothing new to bring”; he simply offers a more “inward” reading of “the old familiar text handed down from the fathers” (WA: 165/SKS 12: 281). While the latter is rather astonishing considering his heterodoxy, “*without*

authority” runs throughout much of his authorship. Its first explicit instantiation is in his 1843 *Two Upbuilding Discourses*, where Kierkegaard presents himself as not having “authority to *preach*.” This disavowal of authority is also intimated in his pseudonymous works. Discussing the ideal self in “Guilty?/Not Guilty?” from *Stages on Life’s Way*, through the voice of Quidam, Kierkegaard presents himself as a negative paradigm and prototype:

From this standpoint of self-understanding, I am well aware that as a human being I am very far from being a paradigm; if anything, I am a sample human being.

But humanly no one can model himself on me, and historically I am even less a prototype for any human being.

(SLW: 365/SKS 6: 339)

Quidam’s disavowal of prototypicality is discussed in the context of responsibility toward a woman who catches his attention. He knows well what responsibility entails—he experimented with it in imagination; still, knowledge gained cannot be substituted for being (actively) responsible, let alone being its exemplar. The context of the entire book seems to stress the poetic dimension of Quidam’s personality that prohibits him from becoming the archetype of responsibility. His poetic relationship toward existence is continued by Kierkegaard in the latter authorship, wherein it morphs into the idea of poetic witnessing or poetic martyrdom.

A journal entry from 1843 discloses a more personal, if not sentimental, reason behind Kierkegaard’s disavowal of authority. Situated among a train of cantankerous notes lamenting the injustice of an unfavorable review of his *Either/Or* by Professor Johan Ludvig Heiberg, the entry facilitates a link between authority and normativity:

I do not wish to be an authority; it must be embarrassing. For instance, if I could receive an honorable and lucrative appointment as a model of virtue, I would decline it, since it must be a burden to be a model of virtue day in and day out.

(EO2: 402/Pap. IV-B 40)

As noted, this disavowal of authority is prompted by Heiberg’s undue judgment of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous *Either/Or*. It seems that, in Kierkegaard’s eyes, this widely respected Danish intellectual and cultural critic is not permitted to criticize his literary production. Yet it would appear that Kierkegaard is permitted to maul his opponent, mostly by ridiculing, and mocking him, accusing him of opportunism and vogueishness (EO 2: 403–405/ Pap. IV-B 46), and questioning his literary authority (EO 2: 399/Pap. IV-B 32).

Regardless of the problematic nature of the genesis of Kierkegaard's repudiation of authority, being the foundation of his negative prototypicality, it receives new iterations in his call for honesty, admission, and, eventually, self-examination on the part of the leaders of the Danish Lutheran Church, Danish intellectuals, and in the long run, every aspiring Christian (JP 1: 174/SKS 23: 348–350, NB19: 28). Presenting himself as a negative model, Kierkegaard discounts potential accusations against him usurping that position, but also deals with his “guilt and imperfection.” He admits to merely communicating the essential features of Christianity, without existentially reduplicating them: “I do not reduplicate, I do not execute what I am lecturing about, I am not what I am saying” (JP 1: 656/SKS 27: 424, Papir 371: 1). Since Kierkegaard does not existentially represent his teaching or thinking—or, in other words, his existence counters what he intellectually claims—he communicates indirectly. Yet, in the indirect nature of his communication, Kierkegaard neither excuses himself *à la* Quidam nor ignores the high bar of Christianity like his compromised contemporaries. Instead, he is authentically struggling to measure up to the standards. “Good Lord, I certainly am not [a Christian], but I am trying, and after all—if we are not to go completely mad—this is the highest there can be any question of—an effort” (JP 4: 4532/Pap. XI-3 B 47). Kierkegaard is trying, and his efforts are not meaningless. They must be understood against the dialectical nature of Christian existence where striving to represent the ideal is negatively “mirrored” in the cognitive appraisal of one's imperfection: “Every step forward toward the ideal is a backward step, for the progress consists precisely in my discovering increasingly the perfection of the ideal—and consequently my greater distance from it” (JP 2: 1789/SKS 24: 47, NB21: 67; Cf. JP 1: 991/SKS 24: 154, NB22: 92).

Arming himself with the means of “perpetual self-accusation,” which he renders as an abridged version of medieval ascetic flogging (JP 1: 45/SKS 24: 410, NB24: 135), Kierkegaard re-embarks on the crusade against religious leaders, as he describes it, “in a different way, as I would use my voice, consequently in direct address to my contemporaries, winning men, if possible” (JP6: 6770/Pap. X-6 B 4:3). The announcement of this new approach, which initially opens his work *For Self-Examination*, is being dropped on account of a more modest goal of “win[ing] a single person” who could potentially “influence others” (FSE: 2–3/SKS 13: 32–33).

Yet it seems that the original intention is closer to the truth regarding Kierkegaard's motivations. Having previously kept himself in the shadows by illuminating the ideal criteria of Christianity, Kierkegaard now brings himself to the fore by exposing himself to what he calls examination or judgment. His self-presentation resembles Rousseau in its form and expectations; it is an unreserved, honest laying bare that hopes to motivate followers to replicate this practice in their own lives. It is his firm belief that, following his exposure, and seeing no interest in doing

so on the part of the clergy, hence bad prototypes, Kierkegaard's followers will expose themselves to the mirror of the Word. Qualifying that the life of a Christian is "essentially action," Kierkegaard incites his readers to follow in his footsteps in confession/admission: "I confess my weakness, and even to you, my reader, do I not? Then you will also confess yours, not to me—no, that is not required—but to yourself and to God" (FSE: 11/SKS 13: 41). His move retains the category of *without authority*, but in contrast to its former iterations where it barred him from preaching, now he justifies his preaching in his earnest striving to reduplicate not in the factual way, but in the Socratic way. Just as "the simple wise man" is occupied with "venturing his life" and "the service of the god," so Kierkegaard's life is occupied with "the Christian thoughts and ideas" (FSE: 9–10/SKS 13: 40). In that, Kierkegaard returns to Socrates as an important model for his presentation of Christianity to the modern audience.

This chapter has brought attention to the complexity of Kierkegaard's engagement with the subject of the prototypes. In my attempt to offer a systematic and critical appraisal of the concept of *Forbillede*, I consulted his signature works that deal with the subject, such as *Fear and Trembling* and *Christian Discourses*. Yet the lion's share of my resources consists of numerous, largely contextual journal entries from various periods of Kierkegaard's production and references made in passing from his early pseudonymous works. Much of my research delves into rarely discussed works from his authorship such as "Postscript to the 'Two Notes'" form *Armed Neutrality*, and *The Book on Adler*.

My account of the subject of the prototypes in Kierkegaard's thought ventures beyond the beaten track of readings that subordinate his *Forbillede*—or, as I should say, *Forbillederne*—to the established *imitatio* scholarly discourse. It shows his experimenting with multiple prototypes and unveils a hidden link between mimesis and prototypicality and such subjects as the ideal self, the category of being "without authority," and "middle terms." It brings forth Kierkegaard's heterodoxy that may pose something of a riddle to Kierkegaardians who explore theological and religious themes in his thought. But most of all, this chapter proves the overall thesis of this book, which argues for the crucial role of mimesis in Kierkegaard's authorship. It presents Kierkegaard as an important continuator of the mimesis discourse who re-engages such mimetic concepts as *exemplum* and *figura* and foreshadows the mimetic thought of Girard. The following chapter will explore the affective and collective mimesis that underpins the tension between the individual and the social dimensions of human existence.

Notes

- 1 For a detailed account of the etymology and various understandings of *exemplum*, see Lyons (2014: 8–33).

- 2 Greek words in brackets have been removed from this quotation for clarity. For a comprehensive presentation of the transition from the Platonic rendering of the goal of philosophy and the philosopher as “becoming like God insofar as is possible” to the Stoics, see Russell (2004).
- 3 “The first is the patience of Job, his obedience to the will of God. The second, the modern response, is Job the rebel, Job the protester en route toward the virulent atheism of the contemporary Western world” (Girard 1992: 186).
- 4 “The members of the community need to make of Job a victim in order to feel good, in order to live more harmoniously with one another, in order to feel established in their faith. They are even ready to make of him, after his death, a semi-divine figure, and this is doubtless why we have the text of Job, whose initial form had to present a plague-ridden person who is shown to be guilty and finally divinized” (Girard 1992: 196).
- 5 “Fortunately, my friend is not looking for clarification from any world-famous philosopher or any *professor publicus ordinarius* [regularly appointed state professor]; he turns to an unprofessional thinker who once possessed the world’s glories but later withdrew from life— in other words, he falls back on Job, who does not posture on a pulpit and make reassuring gestures to vouch for the truth of his propositions but sits and scrapes himself with a potsherd ... here [my friend] has found what he sought, and in his view truth sounds more glorious and gratifying and true in this little circle of Job and his wife and three friends than in a Greek symposium.”
- 6 The literal translation of “hun er tvertimod mere tilskyndende end alle Talers Tilskyndelser, naar det gjælder om at følge hiin Indbydelse, som fører til Alteret” into “she is (has) more incentive than any (other) speaker’s incentive when it pertains to follow this invitation, that leads to the Altar” suggests that the example of “the woman who was a sinner” is more successful in leading others to the Altar, than a prescriptive or descriptive persuasion. According to *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, the root-term “tilskynde” means to incite, but also to persuade and influence to act in a certain way by example. As I will show in the following chapters, this idea runs contrary to the modern spirit, where successful persuasion is based on reasons, not examples, and imitation as such is perceived as a sign of backwardness, intellectual immaturity or as a symptom of a sterile, uncreative, and unoriginal production. Moreover, this example entails a strong role of mimesis in relation to human agency.
- 7 “The ideality [*Idealiteten*] for being a Christian is established so high in the New Testament that even if God got only one single Christian, not one jot must be removed from the requirement. This is the ideal [*Idealitet*], and this is infinite majesty. Take a figure which illustrates what it is meant to illustrate if you do not forget that there is no arbitrariness in God (the ideality [*den Idealitet*] he has established for being a Christian is not something arbitrary, a caprice).”
- 8 Kierkegaard develops various categories that refer to being a human “in a unique way” in his corpus. For example, unpublished during his life, *The Book on Adler* aims to put in order relations between *the* universal, the *single individual*, and the *special individual*, which is *the extraordinary*; see BA: 149–150/SKS 15: 125, and BA: 162–163/ SKS 15: 148.

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6 Affect, Admiration, Crowd

Kierkegaard is widely considered to be among the founders of modern psychology (Klempe 2014; Ferguson 2005). His psychological observations are marked by a serious attention to emotions, affects, feelings, and moods, which are also the philosophical trademark of his reflection. Undoubtedly, Kierkegaard is a pioneer in his theorization of *angst*, and his examination of despair as a psychological-religious category has impacted a number of psychological disciplines, such as existential psychology and psychopathology (McCarthy 2015; Rosfort 2015). Despair and anxiety, but also a number of emotion-related themes such as love in Kierkegaard, have received estimable attention in philosophical literature. Efforts have been dedicated to understanding the relation between particular emotions or emotional states and selfhood, will, subjectivity, and temporality. Other scholars have paid attention to emotions in relation to ethics, epistemology, and ontology (Roberts 1998, 1997, 1993; Conway and Gover 2002; Evans 2006; Rudd 2012; Fremstedal 2014).

While Kierkegaard's philosophy of emotions, affects, and moods did not escape the attention of scholars working in the field of phenomenology (Hanson 2010; Welz 2013), scant consideration has been dedicated to this subject in relation to an important and to some extent parallel trend in philosophy, psychology, and cultural studies, the so-called "affective turn." The scholarly re-turn to affect is prompted by developments in the natural and social sciences that rehabilitated the role of the body in human decision making, value generation, and sociability. The contemporary impetus of the affective turn is motivated by a rigorous attempt to understand the human subject in their complexity, but also by a failure of disciplines privileging the rational, cognitive, and conceptual dimensions of human existence, and by taking the human subject in its individuality, stripping it of social and political contexts. Scholarly focus on affectivity discloses a deeply mimetic view of the human subject. It renders us as engaged in emotional contagion, social imitation, as reflexive and prone to imitative behaviors operating on the register undetected by our consciousness and awareness.

A wide-ranging analysis of affect and affectivity in Kierkegaard is beyond the scope of this book. Focusing on exploring affect in relation to mimesis, this chapter demonstrates Kierkegaard's great alertness to human affectivity in its connection to corporeality, contagion, and sociability. It presents Kierkegaard as acutely aware, *avant la lettre*, of a number of affective phenomena and mechanisms explored by the disciplines of crowd psychology, social cognition, and others. Kierkegaard's penetrating reflections on affectivity in relation to mimesis anticipate some of the theoretical discussions that are central to the affective turn. Rendering affect and human affectivity (*Affectivity* and *affectere*) in mostly negative colors (cf. PF: 49/SKS 4: 253; SUD: 24/SKS 11: 140; WA: 104/SKS 11: 107–108), Kierkegaard offers a sobering critical perspective on the epistemological and moral capacities of the emotion of admiration, a crucial element of the contemporary discussion of excellences in moral exemplarity.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section 6.1 opens with a brief genealogical overview of the subject of affects and human affectivity in the grand intellectual discourse from Plato, through Aristotle, to Descartes, Spinoza, Tomkins, and Massumi. It shows a gradual dismantling of the body-mind and emotion-reason axes that have shaped philosophy and the subsequent emergence of the autonomy of affect. It then presents classical philosophical appraisals of two fundamental categories from the domain of human affectivity, namely sympathy and empathy in the works of David Hume and Adam Smith. This introductory section offers an informative background for Section 6.2, which argues for the affective dimension of admiration in Kierkegaard. After a condensed reprisal of the main tenets of moral exemplarity espoused by Linda Zagzebski followed by an account of Kierkegaard's view of sympathy and empathy, I present affective admiration. In my reading, affective admiration in Kierkegaard is essentially linked with envy, but it is also oriented toward the mediocre and base, has a limited motivational capacity, and is highly contagious. Briefly relating affective admiration in Kierkegaard to the contemporary discussion on moral exemplars, I conclude this section with Kierkegaard's critical view of the epistemological and moral trustworthiness of admiration in moral exemplarity. Section 6.3 zooms in on the affective character of Kierkegaard's crowd psychology. Therein I examine his critical remarks on human collectivity, focusing on such key concepts from his social and political philosophy as "crowd" and "the public." Reading his philosophy alongside two French theorists of mass society, Gabriel Tarde and René Girard, I demonstrate Kierkegaard's attunement to such mimetic terms as magnetism, fascination, somnambulism, scapegoating, and violence.

6.1 Affect, Sympathy, Empathy

The philosophical-religious tradition within which Kierkegaard operates is, for the most part, founded on the idea of a separation of body

and mind. A distinction between emotions and reason is the second fundamental duality that concerned thinkers whose writings Kierkegaard read and whose thought he either cherished or challenged. By surveying some key engagements with thinkers exploring these dualities, we see Kierkegaard joining an important intellectual debate on body-mind/emotions-reason. Treating himself as a patient, Kierkegaard takes a pharmacological approach to affects, breaking from the Platonic dominance of mind over body and turning to Aristotelian observations on habit and (character) formation. Kierkegaard challenges Descartes's body and mind dualism, agreeing with Spinoza on the motivational dimension of emotions and largely incorporating David Hume's, but especially Adam Smith's emphasis on the role of emotions, passions, and habits in the formation of society and its norms.

6.1.1 *Affects and Emotions*

Plato for one exhibits a robust distrust toward the body and emotions. The embodied is the particular, not the true ideal; emotions only distort reasoning. Plato is among the first to verbalize the bond between emotions and the body that constitutes the basis for a rudimentary understanding of affect or affectivity.¹ He readily observes the mimetic aspect of affect that he finds in emotional imitation that often occurs unbeknownst to reason. Criticizing poets and actors, Plato worries that their performances have a tantalizing and debilitating effect on the mental capacities of the audience. There must be a censorship on the practices of the *mimos*, the *mime*, the *poet-actor*, all of whom operate on the affective register that resonates with the audience on a noncognitive level. This affective facet of a poetic-performance constitutes emotional contagion that has a socializing, hence deindividualizing influence on the audience. The scale of the influence of poets on society can be only gauged when considering the predominantly oral-performative character of the culture of Classical Greece.² Thus, apart from disapproving of the compromised educational means of the sophists (discussed in Chapter 1), Plato criticizes “the connection between mimesis and psychological identification” at work in the audience's sympathetic reaction to the performance (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 49).

Unsurprisingly, on the other side of the spectrum, Aristotle positions himself. Rendering human beings as essentially social animals, Aristotle's *eudaimonia*, happiness, includes the habitual cultivation of emotions and affective responses. Classifying important elements of Tragedy in *Poetics*, he identifies as “the most powerful elements of emotional interest in Tragedy—Reversal or Recoil of the Action, and Recognition scenes” (*Poetics* 6, 1450a, 12–13). Confronting or startling the audience, these “elements of emotional interest” are intended to generate affects of pity and fear in the viewers that ultimately lead to the purgation of negative emotions, *katharsis*. Donald R. Wehrs interprets Aristotle's take on affects

in tragedy (and epic) as aiming to “educate our affections into ethical sociability by giving us practice in integrating cognitive, emotional, and ethically sociable aspects of body and mind” (2017: 8). This integrative approach to affects and reason is one in which “[e]mpathetic responsiveness and deliberative rationality come together through our simulating a represented suffering” (Wehrs 2017: 8).

Christianity and Christian philosophy interject into the history of philosophy a strong focus on the love of God. The predominant neo-Platonic appraisal of love in relation to the Christian God emphasizes the fact that in its essence, God is love, and Christians should participate in it by loving God and one’s neighbor as oneself. God is by default a higher type of love, essentially different from lust and other bodily desires. St. Augustine treats lust as an inferior thing in his *Confessions*. He famously admits to being consumed by sensual passions (“Clouds of muddy carnal concupiscence”) that have their origin in “the bubbling impulses of puberty [that] befogged and obscured [his] heart so that it could not see the difference between love’s serenity and lust’s darkness” (Augustine 1991: 24). Affect is then essentially appraised as governed by the lower type of self-love.

Descartes solidifies the mind-body dualism in philosophy. He distinguishes between passions that pertain to the operations of the soul and those that have their origin in bodily functioning. While the former passions are active and pertain to the volitional actions of the soul, the latter passions are passively received by the soul. Such passive passions “belong to the category of perceptions rendered confused and obscure by the close alliance between the soul and the body” (Descartes 2015: 192 [§28]). Such passions are even called “emotions of the soul” by Descartes, because “there are none that agitate and disturb it [the soul] as strongly as these passions” (Descartes 2015: 192 [§28]). While the soul is primarily responsible for the rational part of our being as it pertains to perceptions, bodily passions often distort the validity of our thinking.

Spinoza demonstrates that the human reason and affects are largely integrated. Affect and affectivity mean for Spinoza that we are subject to emotions and feelings and that we are affected and, hence, deeply influenced by them. Our mental actions are reflected in and influenced by bodily changes, and vice versa. Both our reasoning and our affectivity are subordinated to our primary concern—our subsistence—and contribute to it the enhancement of our sense of vitality (Ioan 2019). For Spinoza, we can experience opposite emotions, such as love and hatred. Yet, we should engage “the power of the mind” to try to control the affectivity of these emotions and feelings. Emotions and feelings influence our desires and appetites and motivate us to action. Good actions that result from mental operations such as conceptual reasoning are essentially motivated by positive affects that arise when we are in the process of thinking. Distinguishing between active and passive affects, Spinoza wants us to learn how to overcome the latter ones, which are often painful and

inhibiting, to achieve a psychological state of equilibrium and happiness. The prescribed “remedies for the emotions” are again in “the power of the mind” over emotions that is augmented by our increased knowledge of emotions.

Spinoza’s legacy stands behind the contemporary renewed interest in affects. The so-called “affective turn” challenges a number of solidified modern distinctions such as body/mind, affect/emotion, but also subject/object and individual/collective. To understand the thrust of such contestation of philosophical dualities, one must observe that, as Wehrs points out, “In the twentieth century, ‘affect’ was commonly associated with bodily causality and natural science, ‘emotion’ with ideas, outlooks, social sciences and the humanities” (2017: 1). This means that, especially in the analytic tradition of philosophy, affect was considered for a long time hardly a philosophical subject. This tendency has been challenged with recent developments in neurocognitive-evolutionary studies on embodied cognition, mirror neurons, and social psychology (Werhs 2017: 37–38). Antonio Damasio’s *Descartes’ Error* (1994) is an exemplary study that shows the interconnectedness of emotions and reasoning. His empirical research of the brain demonstrates that the mental images that we engage to entertain future-oriented actions must be emotionally invested and must have the capacity to spontaneously generate bodily actions (“somatically marked”) to equip us with the robust tools needed for deliberative choice-making.

Brian Massumi is among the most recognizable figures behind the affective turn.³ His 1995 article “The Autonomy of Affect” draws heavily on Spinoza, or more specifically Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza. Massumi provides a number of definitions of affects across his literary production, but they all draw on Spinoza’s seminal view that “affect is the power ‘to affect and be affected’” (2002: 15; 2015: x). For Massumi, Spinoza’s affect is essentially linked with a body’s ability to engage with or respond to movement. The body feels emotional experiences that are action generative, and our reflection on this fact is important to our identity and sense of being in the world. Massumi distinguishes between affect and emotion. Emotions are subjective contents of personal experience that yield cognitive results (Massumi 1995: 88). Affects are noncognitive in the general sense of the term that means engaging concepts and words. In contrast to emotions, which are or can be circumstantially shaped and determined (“indexing to conventional meanings in an intersubjective context”; Massumi 1995: 84), our affective capacity is autonomous. The autonomy of affect pertains to the fact that we are not only influenced on the emotional or cognitive level, but also on an affective level that is independent from the other two levels. Affectivity is also privileged in terms of the length of time needed to generate a reaction. For instance, the arousal of fear in us in a hazardous situation is first processed and evaluated by the body itself that generates the effect of hair standing on end,

which is then translated into cognitively processed data that appraises the situation we are in.

Our affective responses, hence bodily reactions, are independent from personal feelings and emotions, but also from the power of language, reason, and will. This means that affects are often beyond our control. In his *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, Silvan S. Tomkins (2008) offers an in-depth evaluation of affects and human affectivity. The second of this four-volume compendium presents an analysis of, among other things, the relation between volition and affectivity. Tomkins asks: “Why have men’s passions been so often identified with the unconscious, darker, irrational, lower, ungovernable, corrupting, disorganizing elements of his nature?” (2008: 79). The answer is that we are neither in negative control nor in positive control over affects. This lack of control is especially visible in extraordinary situations observed in psychopathology: “Affective responses that are painful cannot be turned off, affective responses which are longed for cannot be turned on,” says Tomkins (2008: 80). Lastly, affects are self-reflexive and self-enhancing. For instance, he indicates that affective anger has “the anger-arousing potential of anger”; the effects of the discharge of this affective emotion are “tending to rearouse the same affect” (Tomkins 2008: 81). While experiencing fear, observes Gibbs, one’s hair standing on end will reinforce the experience of fear to the degree that it may mutate into panic (2008: 130–145).

6.1.2 *Sympathy and Empathy*

The two key theoreticians of sympathy and empathy in modern philosophy are David Hume and Adam Smith. While they at times use sympathy and empathy to denote a range of similar objects, sympathy refers to the capacity of “entering into other points of view,” and empathy refers to the state of becoming concerned with someone’s emotional state and the arousal of the motivation to assist them (Ilyes 2017: 98). A brief exposition of their respective treatments of sympathy and empathy offers an important point of reference for Kierkegaard’s conceptualization of sympathy and admiration. It also provides a background for Kierkegaard’s remarks that position him closer to thinkers such as Massumi and Tomkins, but also Tarde on the subject of the autonomy of affect, discussed in the last section of this chapter. In that sense, Kierkegaard is to be positioned as a “transitional” thinker between Hume and Smith, and Massumi and Tomkins.

For David Hume, emotions, passions, and sentiments play an important role in morality. Hume develops his moral psychology in relation to the notions of sympathy, empathy, and the view of shared emotions. His account of empathy in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (2007) focuses on an understanding of emotion as available to us in perception as impressions that have different magnitude, which he calls “vivacity.” We perceive

emotions in ourselves but also in others. Engaging such words as contagion, Hume points out that some emotions that we feel, while at a given moment experienced with a minimal intensity, can be augmented by the fact that they are shared by a group of people (2007: 286). Such shared emotions create a mood that has an affective influence on someone entering the group and not experiencing that emotion initially. Sympathy denotes our ability of responding to our perceptions of the experiences of various emotions and feelings in people and to involve ourselves in them. Defining sympathy in Hume's *Treatise*, Anthony Pitson states:

Sympathy is a principle that explains the pleasing effect upon us of a cheerful face and the dampening effects of angry or sorrowful one. ... [W]hat distinguishes sympathy, as Hume conceives of it, is the fact that we come to *share* that feeling, whether it is of happiness or sadness.

(2020: 95)

The intensity of our sympathetic relationship with others depends on various factors of similarity and proximity. We are more predisposed to sympathize with those who are more like us regarding social status, interests, and way of life, but also those who are simply closer to us by virtue of family relations.

Hume states in the *Treatise* that the "sentiments of others can never affect as, but by becoming, in some measure, our own" (2007: 378). By this he means that our sympathetic sharing of emotions requires a "conversion" of perceived emotions in others from the formed idea of their emotional states to their "impressions" incorporated into the mind. Hence, a perception of people experiencing pleasure is for Hume "converted" into the feeling of pleasure in the observer. This conversion is of an immediate character. It is a semi-automated process that is partially beyond our control; it triggers in us physical responses such as shedding tears in reaction to someone's misfortune. For our own benefit, we should moderate that automatic response by identifying a comparative difference between our state and the state of the person in peril. Yet, moderation that aims at minimizing the magnitude of our sympathizing with others may lead to the unwanted consequences of raising in us a feeling of self-satisfaction and complacency, instead of the feelings that generate empathy. While of an immediate character, the conversion of sympathy has two components: cognitive and affective. Although Hume does not make the distinction, Sharon R. Krause distinguishes between the faculty of cognitive sympathy and affective sympathy in Hume to allow room for deliberation, but also to explain the fact that not every cognitive act yields the feelings of sympathy for others (2013: 80).⁴

Smith focuses on the bigger picture within which our perception of emotions in others occurs. He differs from Hume by insisting on focusing

on how perception, but primarily the imagination, operates in relation to the entire situation in which one encounters a person that is either suffering or is overwhelmed with joy. Ilyes explains the mechanism of empathy thus: “We imagine the entire situation that another person is in, and use this to imagine how we would feel in that situation” (2017: 100). This explains in Smith the range of emotions that arise in us when we observe someone who does not experience that emotion in situations where in fact one should. Smith states:

Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it. We sometimes feel for another, a passion of which he himself seems to be altogether incapable; because, when we put ourselves in his case, that passion arises in our breast from the imagination, though it does not in his from the reality. We blush for the impudence and rudeness of another, though he himself appears to have no sense of the impropriety of his own behaviour; because we cannot help feeling with what confusion we ourselves should be covered, had we behaved in so absurd a manner.
(Smith 2002: 15)

Smith’s account of sympathy addresses the problem in Hume’s theory of emotions with respect to situations where a person breaking moral codes does not in fact experience the feelings of anxiety, regret, etc. Seeing someone audaciously shoplifting, the rise in us of emotions associated with culpability testifies to the fact that shoplifting is morally wrong. A lack of that experience of the emotional arousal on the part of the observer would suggest that the observer approves of shoplifting.

Smith’s theory of sympathetic approbation assumes that there is a correspondence between approbation and adoption of the opinion of others. Approval has a reflective dimension. To approve of someone’s conduct is to recognize in oneself a correspondence between their conduct and one’s own, whether factual or imaginative. To this Smith adds that the principle of approval of values and norms pertains also to that of “the sentiments or passions of others” (2002: 21). This raises some concerns with respect to the cognitive dimension of sympathy, as Smith states that emotions can be felt “instantaneously, and antecedent to any knowledge of them” and that we are susceptible to moods and emotional contagion (2002: 28). Being mindful of Plato’s criticism of the affective dimension of emotions makes it hard to miss the danger lurking behind Smith’s theory of passions. We can be influenced and manipulated by passions that are affective in the sense of serving a socializing purpose, but also unconscious.

The lack of scrutiny of the mind over emotions is confirmed, if not augmented, by Smith’s employment of music to explain the nature of passions and their affective dimension. When music “imitates the notes of anger, it inspires us with fear. Joy, grief, love, admiration, devotion, are all

of them passions which are naturally musical” (Smith 2002: 45). Music is undoubtedly among the most affective and imitative media. It affects us on a range of levels from bodily to reflective. Musical frequencies create responsive, sympathetic vibrations in the body, to which we respond with arousal of emotions, mood changes, and body movements. Smith’s affective vision of the nature of emotions brings him closer to modern theoreticians of affectivity such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Gustave Le Bon, and Gabriel Tarde, but also contemporary thinkers such as Brian Massumi and Nidesh Lawtoo. Body and affects, which since the inception of philosophy have been regarded with suspicion, are now incorporated into moral and social theory.

While the spontaneity of the emotional transference in Hume and Smith suggests emotional contagion, the subject discussed toward the end of this chapter, for Ilyes such situations are rather an exception than the norm with regard to accurately understood sympathetic reactions (2017: 101). She interprets both thinkers as intentionally making room for reflection and awareness with relation to our recognition of the appropriated value of emotions (Ilyes 2017: 101). Even for Hume, who identifies emotions as objects of our cognition, but also as being object-oriented (we are fearful *of* something, we grieve *for* someone), the arousal of emotions refers not to the fact that they are represented to us in the person we empathize with, but are often initiated from our inference based on the principle of cause and effect (2007: 368). For Smith, one’s empathetic response to another’s emotional state includes the act of reflective comparison with one’s imaginative anticipation of such a response. “For Hume, such a comparison is not essential to empathy: the imagination’s task is to reconstruct what the other person is feeling, not what I would feel in her situation, as it is in Smith” (Ilyes 2017: 101).

6.2 Kierkegaard, Sympathy, Admiration

This section demonstrates a distinctively affective reading of admiration in Kierkegaard. Affective admiration proves problematic for the contemporary discussion of exemplarity in moral psychology, as it challenges the moral and epistemological capacity of admiration. This section also corrects problematic engagements of admiration in Kierkegaard to support the motivational, moral, and epistemological capacities of admiration in relation to moral exemplars. These exploits, which seek in Kierkegaard confirmation of the cognitive and motivational value of admiration for exemplarity, are not entirely true to his overall rendering of this emotion.

6.2.1 *Admiration and Exemplarity in Moral Education*

The study of exemplarity has been burgeoning for the last two decades especially in the philosophical disciplines concerned with moral education

and moral development. In those discussions, scholars have focused on determining who an exemplar is by arguing for the right set of characteristics one should possess. Scholars have also considered what in the exemplars is actually of value for the imitators. The other important aspect in the debate pertains to identifying the right means that would allow for identification of the exemplars. Robert Audi (2017), Kristján Kristjánsson (2010, 2017), and Linda Zagzebski (2013, 2017) argue for the role of emotions in that respect, particularly admiration, honour, and awe.

Focusing primarily on admiration, Zagzebski finds it to be a trustworthy means of detecting both moral exemplars and the desirable traits in them. Positioning admiration as the fundamental element of a moral theory based on exemplarism, Zagzebski stresses four important aspects of this emotion. First, admiration is a trustworthy means of detecting qualities that are desirable for human moral development. It is an emotional response to an excellence, which has predominantly a moral and, more specifically, an aretaic dimension. Second, admiration “is something that attracts a person to moral improvement” (Zagzebski 2013: 194). It does so through its sheer emotional character. The power of admiration to move us into a particular direction translates especially into the third dimension of admiration: it leads to imitation. Imitation is considered to be distinct from mimicry insofar as it is “more discriminatory, more targeted” (Zagzebski 2017: 130). Of interest for Zagzebski is in fact emulation “in which the emulated person is perceived as a model in some respect” (2017: 140). Fourth, so understood, imitation can therefore be scrutinized by reflection.

While sketching admiration, Zagzebski points to two of its aspects that could be potentially problematic for her reading of this emotion. First, admiration can be influenced and engineered. Here, she understands the fact that admiration can be taught (“is subject to education through the example of the emotional reactions of other persons”) and can be “shaped by the emotional responses of others” (Zagzebski 2013: 200–201). These aspects of admiration are not sufficiently explained, though, especially with regard to the interconnections between admiration and other emotions. Referring to Kierkegaard, Zagzebski notices the link between admiration and envy, but she renders the complexity of this emotion as an unusual “distortion of admiration,” rather than its natural structure (2017: 50). Hence, as I argue later, Zagzebski does not have a proper view of admiration in Kierkegaard, and she mistakenly takes Kierkegaard as her ally with regard to moral and epistemological capacities of admiration. Second, believing that admiration can “survive reflection” and that subsequently it must be decided by an agent whether we “trust it” (Zagzebski 2013: 201), Zagzebski is only vaguely aware of Kierkegaard’s criticism of the motivational character of admiration and its self-evidentiality in relation to the detection of excellences.

Kierkegaard's critical reading of admiration is especially pertinent to the context of moral exemplarity. Yet, as I will argue in the last chapter of this book, the affective character of admiration and human affectivity more broadly are problematic for human authenticity and the development of the individual and social self. Hence, Kierkegaard's insights into the affective nature of human beings are important for philosophy more broadly. They are also strikingly aligned with contemporary studies of admiration in neuroscience, human behavior, crowd psychology, and emotional contagion.⁵ These remarks will lead us to Section 6.3 that unveils Kierkegaard's insights about the affective nature of human sociability.

I define the affective in admiration in Kierkegaard as meaning its shared emotional character that is: (1) essentially influenceable by other emotions, affects, and the body, hence malleable; (2) contagious, unconscious, involuntary, and collective, hence prone to mimicry; (3) oriented toward the average (rather than excellence) hence corruptible; and (4) having a limited motivational power.

6.2.2 *Sympathy*

Admiration in Kierkegaard is essentially linked with sympathy and empathy. The Danish for sympathy is *Sympathie*. Kierkegaard also uses *Medlidenhed*, which translates into English as "suffering with," and means the act of sympathizing and empathizing with someone, but also producing a fellow feeling that grasps their emotional state. Sympathy exhibits for Kierkegaard a strongly preferential tone. We sympathize with individuals but also with groups of people. One important description of sympathy appears in *The Concept of Anxiety* where Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author, Vigilius Haufniensis, presents a rather Smithian account of sympathy:

One must have sympathy [*Sympathie*]. However, this sympathy is true only when one admits rightly and profoundly to oneself that what has happened to one human being can happen to all. Only then can one benefit both oneself and others.

(CA: 54/SKS 4: 359)

Sympathy is then presented here as comprising one's ability to imaginatively and reflectively reconstruct the situation the other is in. As we learn from "A Married Man" in *Stages on Life's Way*, this ability, understood as a universal human feat, must be practiced, and expressed in real spatiotemporal life (SLW: 113/SKS 6: 107).

True sympathy is contrasted with "a cowardly sympathy" that, after it identifies an imperfection in the other and possibly pities them in consequence of that recognition, ends up emphasizing one's essential difference

from the afflicted person. “Cowardly sympathy” not only looks down on someone but relishes in the illusion of one’s immunity from the identified problem. Genuine sympathy is the skill of the psychological observer who, as I have discussed in Chapter 4, has the ability “to incline and bend himself to other people and imitate their attitudes” (CA: 54–55/SKS 4: 359). In the religious sense, sympathy is more than compassion toward the unfortunate, but is the lived experience of “all true equality for the fortunate, the rich and powerful, and for the halt, the blind, and the lame” (JP 1: 457/SKS 27: 361, Papir 340: 15), and it is embodied in the non-preferential neighbor love (WL: 140/SKS 9: 142).

Sympathy in Kierkegaard is affective for a number of reasons. It operates on the collective level and has a motivational character. Haufniensis presents it as “the most paltry of all social virtuosities and aptitudes” (CA: 119–120/SKS 4: 421). Kierkegaard’s “deep sympathy for simply and solely being human, especially the suffering, unhappy, handicapped, and the like,” motivates him to take in his life a self-sacrificial path (JP 1: 1017/SKS 23: 20, NB15: 19; JP 1: 236/SKS 21: 286, NB10: 57). Sympathy is contagious. Although he does not seek suffering himself, the sufferings of others prompt the rise of empathy in Kierkegaard (PV: 80–81/SKS 16:59). His sacrifice is meant to comfort their suffering and clarify the truth of Christianity; as Kierkegaard assumes, his martyrdom will cure their suffering. The contagious dimension of sympathy is indicative of the frustration of the essence of Christianity that is to be found in self-sacrifice. Speaking of the passion to sacrifice one’s life to testify for the truth of Christianity, Kierkegaard specifies that this passion can also mutate into “sympathy, which spreads itself about and gets to be loved, esteemed by men.” The contagiousness of passions is then something negative that reduces Christianity to “a merely human sympathy” (JP 1: 488/SKS 21: 97–98, NB7: 43).

Sympathy is affective as it produces ambivalent reactions; in a Spinozian sense, sympathy in Kierkegaard can simultaneously generate conflated feelings and reactions. Haufniensis calls it the phenomenon of sympathetic antipathy and attributes it to anxiety. “Anxiety is *sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy* [*en sympatetisk Antipathie og en antipatetisk Sympathie*]” (CA: 42/SKS 4: 348) for Haufniensis, because, as a passion, emotion, or even a kind of a desire, anxiety is essentially ambiguous. By calling it a *sympathetic antipathy*, Haufniensis distinguishes it from Augustine’s concupiscence, which is a powerful desire that usually has one direction and a particular effect on the body, pleasing or displeasing. Haufniensis says: “One speaks of a pleasing anxiety, a pleasing anxiousness, and of a strange anxiety, a bashful anxiety, etc.” (CA: 42/SKS 4: 348). Sympathy is then essentially ambivalent and linked with its opposite, antipathy. Lastly, as we learn from *Stages on Life’s Way*, sympathy is sympathy generative. The more we sympathize with someone’s situation, the more sympathy arises in us (SLW: 113–114/SKS 6: 107–108). This observation overlaps with Spinoza’s affective account of

passions, where the expression of passion enlivens this and other related passions. Sympathy must be, as I have indicated, expressed in the temporal, otherwise it remains in idealized, imaginative “human sympathy” (JP1: 347/SKS 22: 284, NB13: 18).

In “The Esthetic Validity of Marriage” from *Either/Or 2*, its author, Judge William, presents sympathy as prompting admiration (“neither shall I be so unsympathetic [*udeeltagende*] that I would withhold my admiration”) utilizing the Smithian account of sympathy as largely will-dependent. Yet, the Danish “*udeeltagende*” for sympathy means in the quote the property of being “non-participatory;” hence, the whole context in the passage renders sympathy as a Humean “participatory” appropriation of someone’s perspective as one’s own (EO 2: 31/SKS 3: 39). A more empathetic view of sympathy we see in an open letter written by a pseudonymous editor of *Either/Or 2*, Victor Eremita to Kierkegaard. Therein, Eremita expresses “sympathy for [Kierkegaard’s] sufferings” and “tak[es] pride in daring to admire [him]” (EO 2: 391/Pap IV-B 20). Admiration and sympathy respond to Kierkegaard’s peculiar literary situation where he is being commonly “unjustly” called out to admit that he in fact is Eremita and to take responsibility for explaining the complexity of the authorial production.

6.2.3 Admiration

Kierkegaard’s interest in admiration resembles many concerns around this emotion articulated by thinkers such as Descartes, Smith, Hume, and Kant. His reading of admiration shows significant knowledge of Aristotle’s consideration of this emotion in relation to envy and emulation (CD: 130–131/SKS 10: 141). Descartes’s and Spinoza’s works reconstruct how admiration arises in us and how it influences our dispositions to pursue that which is beneficial to us. They also inquire into how admiration influences the overall functionality of individuals in the world. Smith pursues knowledge of the relation between admiration and other emotions, which he calls sentiments. He is especially focused on distinguishing admiration from the related sentiments of wonder and surprise. Smith also wants to understand to what extent admiration enhances or inhibits various operations of the mind.

Kant distinguishes between respect [*Achtung, Ehrfurcht*] and admiration [*Bewunderung*], which he often characterizes as a kind of astonishment [*Verwunderung*] or surprise [*Erstaunen*] (Merritt 2017: 462–463). While Kant sees admiration as delegated to appreciate the natural sublime or athletic feats, respect is oriented toward the moral law. This means that the latter compels me to accept particular aspects of the moral law as mine; in contrast, admiration arises in me when I witness or learn about things that, in principle, will not be applicable or will not affect my life (Merritt 2012: 47–48).

Often offering groundbreaking analyses of passions, moods, and affects, Kierkegaard indicates that emotions disclose our human nature. Yet, while such emotive traits as a solemn mood of contemplation or passionate determination to act are signs of our individuality and character, other passions and affects, often of an immediate character, are the hallmarks of our inauthenticity that on the whole stem from social dependency (Roberts 1998: 178). These negative emotions and passions disclose the limits of human nature essentially affected by the Christian category of sin.

Kierkegaard discusses admiration in relation to individual exemplars—which he dubs “prototypes”—or social entities such as gatherings or various groups of people, and their attitudes, values, and actions. He also presents various crafts, skills, and works of art deemed worthy of admiration. “Admiration” [*Beundring*] or “to admire” [*beundre*] feature densely throughout his authorship. An important sustained analysis of admiration is present in Kierkegaard’s discourse from 1848 entitled: “The Joy of It: That the Weaker You Become the Stronger God Becomes in You.” Therein Kierkegaard dialectically defines admiration as “in itself a duplexity” (CD: 130/SKS 10: 141). This duplexity in admiration pertains to the fact that admiration can affect us on both positive and negative levels; it can effect a feeling of happiness and unhappiness in us. Drawing on Aristotle’s distinction between emulation and envy, emotions that result from being exposed to an excellence of which we are deprived, Kierkegaard states that admiration may initially produce pain in us:

That admiration’s first feeling is one of pain is seen in this, that if someone senses superiority but admits it reluctantly, not joyfully, then he is far from being happy: on the contrary he is exceedingly unhappy, in the most distressing pain.

(CD: 131/SKS 10: 141)

After we come to terms with the superiority that produces admiration in us, we become more authentic and wholesome through conscious reconciliation with that which on the emotional level we find of value. This safeguards us from “succumbing to the superiority” of admiration and from entering into bitterness and envy.

Kierkegaard engages admiration to laud and appreciate human crafts and achievements, such as the skillful harmonizing of themes and a mastery of language in a novel. There are a number of other instances that indicate that an arousal of admiration in us when encountering something extraordinary is a positive, or a warranted sign of recognition of that particular good; here, Kierkegaard largely agrees with Zagzebski, for whom admiration spontaneously responds to excellences. One such example is Kierkegaard’s admiration formulated *expressis verbis* in relation to the writing prowess of his contemporary Gyllembourg-Ehrensward, especially

her work entitled *The Story of Everyday Life*. In his appraisal of the book *Two Ages*, entitled *A Literary Review*, Kierkegaard says:

How admirably and masterfully the author knows how to control a glittering and delusive weakness such as this, communicating at all times the impression of a fictitious-real character; likewise the ease with which the interrelated situations are invented, the naturalness with which the thread of continuity runs throughout the story, continually illuminating Mrs. Waller's lack of character in the momentary mirror of reflection, fleetingly, for in fact there is nothing to dwell upon.

(TA: 54/SKS 8: 53)

Yet, the same book suggests that admiration can be problematic. The reasons for Kierkegaard's distrust of admiration are complex; his review predominantly calls out the malleability of admiration and its cyclical nature. Heretofore, scholars have only considered a small number of those reasons.

The most explored reason behind Kierkegaard's distrust of admiration is formulated in the period of his so-called "second authorship" that stretches from 1847 to 1855, especially in *Practice in Christianity*. Published under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus, the book focuses on admiration's shortcomings and inadequacies with regards to the requirements of an authentic Christian existence, which demands from Christians not admiration but imitation. The dominant reading of Kierkegaard's criticism of admiration focuses on its tendency to make individuals into detached spectators of the Christian drama, rather than active participants who want to *follow after* Christ (Pardi 2013: 17–21; Minister 2017). Rob Compaijen (2017) paints a more nuanced reading of admiration in Kierkegaard. While he concedes the criticism of the attributed detached attitude of the admirer toward the admired in Kierkegaard, Compaijen notes that admiration is not wrong *per se*. Rather, considered as a "spontaneous admiration," it is not effective enough to solve the problem of the ethical motivation to be like the exemplar (2017: 572–573).

Focusing solely on Kierkegaard's criticism of admiration painted against the specifically Christian element of his thought obscures and reduces the complexity of its appraisal in Kierkegaard. As I argue, his distrust of admiration is based on Kierkegaard's psychological and sociological observations on human nature. He finds admiration to be a highly affective emotion: it is affected by and mingles with other, often opposite emotions; it is oriented toward achieving mediocrity and baseness, rather than merit and virtue; it has a limited motivational power. Lastly, admiration is collective and contagious.

Kierkegaard's early analyses of admiration's ability to evoke, but also to mutate into other emotions come from the already mentioned short

piece, *A Literary Review*. Discussing a hypothetical situation where spectators observe the exploits of a “brave person who skates out on the thin ice,” Kierkegaard specifies how the initial “authentic admiration” that arises in us when we observe the extraordinary and praiseworthy becomes socially manipulated and engineered into the common and uninteresting, but also “foolish and ridiculous:”

But whereas what usually happens where admiration is authentic is that the admirer is inspired by the thought of being a man just like the distinguished person, is humbled by the awareness of not having been able to accomplish this great thing himself, is ethically encouraged by the prototype to follow this exceptional man’s example to the best of his ability, here again practical common sense would alter the pattern of admiration. Even at the giddy height of the fanfare and the volley of hurrahs, the celebrators at the banquet would have a shrewd and practical understanding that their hero’s exploit was not all that good.

(TA: 72/SKS 8: 70)

6.2.3.1 *Admiration and Envy*

The altering of the pattern of admiration that Kierkegaard is alluding to in the previous passage harkens back to Aristotle’s distinction between envy and emulation. Aristotle defines emulation as a painful but positive emotion that arises in us when we recognize a good in someone that we ourselves do not possess but are determined to acquire; its opposite is envy, which characterizes the person who “tries to prevent his neighbour from having” that honorable good (*Rhetoric*, 161). In contrast to Aristotle, who paints a “sharp conceptual and moral contrast drawn between emulation and envy” (Kristjánsson 2016: 104), Kierkegaard assumes a more fluent transition from “following this exceptional man’s example” to enviously denigrating the excellence. For instance, in “An Occasional Discourse” from 1847, Kierkegaard raises the bar, suggesting an existence of human comportment where “admiration and envy are united” (UDVS: 127/SKS 8: 227).

A more sustained analysis of the relation between the two emotions indicates that admiration can be conflated or united with envy, but that it can also mutate into envy on four interrelated levels. First, as we have already established, we can become envious of those who we admire, because we may feel that we cannot measure up to their standards. Such an emotion can still be a form of admiration, because it is focused on that which is magnificent, but with an envious twist (JP4: 4213/SKS 24: 292, NB23: 181).

Second, our admiration of someone can spur envy in others against the admired person, or even us. We see that formula at work in *Practice*

in Christianity, where Kierkegaard suggests that a person meritoriously admired by an individual, yet deliberately unrecognized as that by a group of people, may become a target of their contempt, mockery, and violence (PC: 240–243/SKS 12: 233–236). Those who refuse to appreciate a meritoriously admirable person do so to avoid a confrontation with the moral and non-moral excellences expressed by the admired person. Their motivation for that rejection is in their unwillingness to approve of the standards that would force them to challenge their own lessened standards. This process of dealing with the enviously admired can be better understood when read alongside Smith's view of admiration as approbation. Smith states: "To approve of the passions of another ... is the same thing as to observe that we entirely sympathize with them" (2002: 21). For Smith and Kierkegaard, our admiration of a given person is tantamount to our approbation of their values. Yet, as Kierkegaard points out, often individuals who experience an arousal of the feeling of admiration toward someone whose values they do not appreciate, stricken by this conflict, become motivated to "resolve" this opposition by turning against the admired person rather than by revisiting their values.

Third, our dissatisfaction with the admired person can be displaced by bitterness toward them. For Kierkegaard, it is admiration that turned into anger and violence that killed both Socrates and Christ. Such an envious and violent admiration is exerted by the former admirers of the Danish actress, Johanne Luise Heiberg, whose case Kierkegaard elaborates in *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*. Finding admiration to be often determined by the changing social "cannibalistic taste for human sacrifices," Kierkegaard doubts whether admiration can indeed offer a reliable way of identifying value (CD: 304/SKS 14: 94).

Fourth, the emotion of admiration can mutate into envy directed toward the admirer themselves. Calling it "unhappy admiration," Kierkegaard describes this facet of admiration as resulting from one's unwillingness to both acknowledge the admired traits recognized in the exemplar and to act on that recognition to acquire these traits. In consequence, the admirer "must get rid of it [the admired quality], pass it off as a bagatelle, nonsense, and folly, for it seems as if it would choke him" (SUD: 86/SKS 11: 199). The unhappy admirer attempts this act of reassessment and rejection of the recognized value to save one's present sense of selfhood, which appears to them as being of lesser value in comparison with the admired person. Kierkegaard diagnoses such a person thus:

An admirer who feels that he cannot become happy by abandoning himself to it chooses to be envious of that which he admires. So he speaks another language wherein that which he actually admires is a trifle, a rather stupid, insipid, peculiar, and exaggerated thing.

(SUD: 86/SKS 11: 199)

Conceding that “Admiration is happy self-surrender; [and] envy is unhappy self-assertion,” Kierkegaard indicates a kind of freedom and release that stems from the fact that one admits to themselves that they are facing someone who, while morally superior, is not a disintegrating threat to their own self (SUD: 86/ SKS 11: 199).

6.2.3.2 *Admiration, Motivation, Mediocrity*

For Kierkegaard, admiration is not powerful enough to motivate us to do the good. At face value, this claim has a distinctively Kantian flavor. For Kant, only respect for the moral law “motivates” us to fulfill it. Yet Kierkegaard is skeptical of the self-motivating character of knowledge and reasoning. He criticizes admiration’s ability to motivate us to learn and practically express in our lives what we find morally desirable in others. The inability of admiration to motivate individuals to reproduce in real life types of behavior they find desirable or praiseworthy in others is caused by the nature of this emotion. Admiration has a cycle: its initial intensity is necessarily followed by a process of fading and eventual dispersion; it must be “nourished” and revived to be of motivational capacity (CD: 304/SKS 14: 94). The more we dwell on our admiration of someone, the more we think about and analyze it, the less power it has to motivate us to act. Admiration must be acted upon, and to achieve action, we need a degree of willingness that is not always generated by admiration (JP 2: 1895/SKS 24: 277, NB23: 144). Without the extra component that generates the decision to act on it, admiration is the expression of human indulgence in indecisiveness. Kierkegaard confirms as much in *Practice in Christianity* and his journals, linking admiration to “evasion” thus:

Here admiration is totally inappropriate and ordinarily is deceit, a cunning that seeks evasion and excuse. If I know a man whom I must esteem because of his unselfishness, self-sacrifice, magnanimity, etc., then I am not to admire but am supposed to be like [*ligne*] him; I am not to deceive and fool myself into thinking that it is something meritorious on my part, but on the contrary I am to understand that it is merely the invention of my sloth and spinelessness; I am to resemble [*ligne*] him and immediately begin my effort to resemble [*efter at ligne*] him.

(PC: 242/SKS 12: 235)

And,

With respect to a merely human prototype [*menneskeligt Forbillede*] ... there is no time for admiration—get busy right away with the task of imitating him [Christ]. The ethical truth of the matter is just this—that admiration is suspiciously like an evasion.

(JP4: 4454/SKS 21: 285, NB10: 56)

While it seems that the first quotation radically dismisses the value of admiration as such, the second passage demonstrates that the problem with admiration is that it needs an extra push from the will. Hence, in contrast to proponents of moral exemplarity such as Zagzebski, who argue for admiration's self-motivating character, Kierkegaard finds admiration insufficient to propel one into action. The problem in Zagzebski's theory is not simply that at fault is mostly "spontaneous admiration," as has been argued by Compaijen, who suggests a more reflective type of admiration as a remedy to the problem with admiration's self-motivation. In fact, as the two previous passages indicate, a more robust reflection results from but also produces in one "a cunning that seeks evasion and excuse" (PC: 242/SKS 12: 235).

Kierkegaard's criticism of admiration here is largely motivated by the religious underpinnings of the doctrine of sin and the fallen human nature; we can trust neither our own affective responses nor our reasoning for that matter, as it is often engaged to justify our actions that result from our propensity to lower the bar of responsibility. Kierkegaard seems to be criticizing Aristotle here with respect to his idea of the habitual education of affective responses. While Kierkegaard is not wholly dismissive of Aristotle's character building, he points out that what needs to be accounted for is the Christian category of sin that hampers many of our seemingly well-motivated actions.

These critical remarks bring Kierkegaard close to Spinoza, who sees the key to moral motivation not simply in knowledge or emotions, but in our greater awareness of the complexity of the entanglement of both. This knowledge consists in knowing how emotions operate, how to disentangle them when they appear to us in a confused manner, and, in consequence, how to direct and reorganize them anew by linking with other passions. Moreover, for Kierkegaard, admiration does not necessarily target the virtuous, but instead can be—and indeed tends to be—about something mediocre or even base. This point about admiration's orientation toward the mediocre and base is another factor that challenges the theory of moral exemplarity that ascribes to admiration the ability to detect moral and non-moral excellences.

Kierkegaard says that admiration frustrates people's determination and ambitions to achieve something great. Speaking of the "levelling" power of admiration in an entry entitled "Criminal Mediocrity," he writes: "they see that by indolence and minor performances they very easily manage to become admired, loved, esteemed, and rewarded in every way by all the mediocrity, which is the great power in society" (JP 3: 2686/Pap. XI-3 B 177). To that end, Kierkegaard presents admiration as problematic when it comes to targeting excellence and perfection. Criticizing admiration for being impotent in identifying the virtuous and excellence, he presents in his journal the master of thieves and the champion cheating student as

exemplifying situations where one can admire something dishonorable, hence, ironically, the non-admirable.

Just as in the grades the one who was most esteemed by his comrades was the boy who knew how to fool the teacher most cleverly, so the world always admires one thing only—a dishonesty more clever than the previous one.

(JP 2: 2232/SKS 26: 33, NB31: 44)

This kind of approbation, he remarks elsewhere, “is wasted on the unrighteous and the dissolute just as much as it is offered to the righteous” (EUD: 151/SKS 5: 152). By this Kierkegaard means not only the fact that admiration’s “aboutness” is directed toward the good and the bad, but also that it is socially determined.

6.2.3.3 *Admiration, Sociability, Contagion*

The sociability of admiration and its contagious dimension—subjects discussed more deeply in the following part of this chapter—are important aspects of Kierkegaard’s affective reading of this emotion. While admiration has often an individual dimension—we can admire someone for some reason—it also has a collective dimension—where, for instance, a group of people admires a person or their skill. In *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de silentio speaks of “public admiration” evoked in an audience that produces affective outcomes such as tears thus: “It is great when the poet in presenting his tragic hero for public admiration dares to say: ‘Weep for him, for he deserves it’” (FT: 66/SKS 4: 158). Linking public admiration with worldly admiration, Johannes de silentio takes the latter to represent an instance of collective admiration. The danger of any collective emotion is that it can effortlessly proliferate among people where it can often become detached from its original object. The poet must be able to “keep the crowd under restraint” so it is focused on the merit toward which admiration is directed (FT: 66/SKS 4: 158).

This need for the control of the crowd in relation to emotions such as admiration—a clearly Platonic remark—is not simply metaphorical; Kierkegaard finds admiration to be a highly contagious emotion. It spreads easily between people as an unconscious, sympathetic, fellow feeling, especially in gatherings. It is a social and collective “entity” that resembles such domains as moods, trends, policies, or even ideologies. He presents crowds as often engaging in or being bewitched by admiration. As an affective emotion, admiration is at the foundation of social bonding. Its social manifestation, often expressed in outbursts of admiration, has its basis in the social unconscious that ties people together around a shared value.

In his pseudonymous essay “Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?” its author speaks of admiration that “darkly lurks in the age” (WA: 81/SKS 11: 85). Calling it contemptuously “the age’s admiration,” Kierkegaard attributes to it a kind of potentiality of force that can be shaped and directed by those who understand its mechanism. One such person for Kierkegaard is “a psychologist” who is able to awaken collective admiration among his fellowmen to, for instance, cause violence. This is possible since “Spurned admiration is at the same moment an absolute passion of indignation” (WA: 81/SKS 11: 85). This Spinozian remark, which suggests the conflation and interrelation of emotions that represent different, often opposing valences, indicates that its generation and further enhancement lead to uncontrolled and rapid outbursts of collective violence.

Our knowledge of the mechanism of affective admiration cannot protect us against its charm. An example of this is given in Kierkegaard’s critique of sermons delivered by one of his contemporaries, the widely admired and respected bishop Mynster. Kierkegaard shows how Mynster’s pathos-filled, emotional invocations have a contagious effect on the congregation of listeners.

Mynster orates and says: And He did not withhold the great words, but He [Christ] said them: I am indeed a king—and then Mynster weeps, and I, Miss Jespersen, Student Møller, Chairman of the Board Nissen, Grocer Grønberg, etc. etc.—all of us weep and admire Mynster; many a one is not at all clear whether he is weeping at the thought of Christ or shedding tears of admiration for Mynster.

(JP 3: 3348/SKS 23: 411, NB20: 35)

This passage indicates that the affectivity of admiration operates irrespective of the character formation and social standing of the affected. Equally affected are the educated and uneducated, or the bourgeoisie and the working class. Even Kierkegaard, so vigilantly aware of the affective power of admiration, is not immune to it. In this comment Kierkegaard takes on Aristotle’s supposition that morally developed persons are immune to the affective, hence the collective, involuntary, and unconscious dimensions of admiration. Our knowledge of how admiration operates, but also our ability to identify persons exerting affective influence on others, is important in trying to “control” it, but it does not guarantee that we are immune from its negative effects. Here, Kierkegaard seems to be moving beyond Spinoza, for whom the key to controlling passive affects lies in the knowledge of their operations.

Kierkegaard’s remark concerning the affective dimension of Mynster’s preaching demonstrates that he is cognizant of what Gabriel Tarde calls the power of “magnetism” and “prestige.” Discussing the foundational element of society in *The Laws of Imitation*, Tarde draws attention to

figures that produce in us not admiration—which he sees as largely warranting excellence—but fascination. Such persons magnetize us through their charisma and display of positive emotions. “The magnetizer does not need to lie or terrorize to secure the blind belief and the passive obedience of his magnetized subjects. He has prestige—that tells the story” (Tarde 1903: 78). The magnetizer is someone who, like a psychologist, provides the magnetized objects the occasion to vent their often unconscious emotions and urges. Tarde adds:

[T]here is in the magnetized subject a certain potential force of belief and desire which is anchored in all kinds of sleeping but unforgotten memories, and that this force seeks expression just as the water of a lake seeks an outlet.

(1903: 78)

Mynster is such a magnetizer who, taking advantage of his prestige and oratorical skills, unifies people around their unconscious and unadmitted resistance to following through with the radical requirements of Christianity (JP 4: 6761/SKS 24: 348–349, NB24: 51).

6.3 Crowd, Contagion, Violence

“The Crowd is Untruth” is one of the most famous quotes from Kierkegaard known to readers beyond the academy. It signals Kierkegaard’s vehement criticism of phenomena that followed the emergence of mass society, such as fashion, entertainment, press, the public. The Enlightenment, which hoped to bring about further liberation of human individuality and the reign of reason, brought standardization and affect-generated collective behaviors. Yet for the first time in centuries, multitudes of people were able to unite to redefine their place in the world and gain meaning and power.

6.3.1 *Crowd and the Public*

The emergence of mass society was hardly something to celebrate for Kierkegaard. The advent of crowds occurred at the expense of the individual – the category essentially defining every human being. The crowd is, for Kierkegaard, a dangerous phenomenon that can exercise force while being anonymous; it is a phantom that cannot be held accountable for its actions. It functions in the sphere of doxa. Operating predominantly in the realm of physical proximity, it projects the power of opinion that shapes customs, policies, laws, and religion.

The functioning of the crowd is largely based on shared feelings, emotions, passions, and affects. Despite many observations from scholars who locate his interest in the phenomenon of human collectivity to his

later production, Kierkegaard expresses his contempt for crowds already as early as in his pseudonymous *Fear and Trembling*. Initially indicating the difficulty with discerning the knight of faith from a crowd of people in “Preliminary Expectoration” (FT: 39/SKS 4: 134), Johannes de silentio embarks on a critique of those who would like to attempt to replicate the knight of faith collectively (FT: 79–81/SKS 4: 170–171). The knight of faith is presented as worthy of admiration and imitation, but such imitation proves challenging for people as it must occur on an individual level. Put differently, whether the knight of faith can be imitated, and what it actually means, is a matter of individual discernment, not a consensual decision that deflects and disperses the responsibility and gravity of that judgment on a number of people. Collective appropriation of the knight of faith is simply “cheating ... in the world of spirit.” In his own words,

A dozen sectarians go arm in arm with one another ... The sectarians deafen one another with their noise and clamor, keep anxiety away with their screeching. A hooting carnival crowd like that thinks it is assaulting heaven, believes it is going along the same path as the knight of faith, who in the loneliness of the universe never hears another human voice but walks alone with his dreadful responsibility.
(FT: 80/SKS 4: 170–171)

The effect that is achieved in grouping, as we have seen in the previous section, is largely a lowering of moral and intellectual expectations fortified by unified mutual reassurance. This resembles the echo chamber effect occurring in social gatherings immune to feedback from the outside. Johannes de silentio’s acrimonious account of the crowd of believers has a distinctly animal and primal tone. Their collectivity is founded and strengthened by affective behaviors attributed to herd animals such as “hooting,” producing “noise and clamor,” and “screeching.” This “carnivality” and the lowering expectations eventuated by the crowd is largely behind what the author calls, ironically, “the worldly admiration of expertise.”

Kierkegaard’s references to the crowd are formulated in relation to his radical apology of individuality (JP 2: 2030/SKS 24: 32, NB21: 34; PV: 105–124/SKS 16: 85–104). He positions himself as a continuator of Schleiermacher’s ethics of individuality, but also as a kind of response to Hegel’s philosophy of the system as well as the less widely known figure of Johann Kaspar Schmid, known as Max Stirner. Some scholars situate Kierkegaard alongside existentialist critics of mass society such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Ortega y Gasset (Tuttle 1996). His remarks about mass society anticipate a number of problems discussed now in the disciplines of crowd psychology and even social ontology, locating him among the precursors of sociology such as Gustave Le Bon, Gabriel Tarde, and Emile Durkheim (Kaftanski 2020). That intellectual tradition

emphasizes the fundamental role of imitation in humans in the formation and the functioning of society. This tradition has received renewed attention from the French anthropologist René Girard. His theory of mimetic desire and scapegoating has been analyzed in relation to Kierkegaard most notably by Charles Bellinger. His groundbreaking (Bellinger 1996) essay with a symptomatic title, “‘The Crowd Is Untruth’: A Comparison of Kierkegaard and Girard,” identifies in Kierkegaard’s works such key elements from Girard’s writings as scapegoating, the social crisis, victimhood, mimetic desire, and violence.

To avoid redoubling Bellinger’s efforts, I explore passages in Kierkegaard that, to my knowledge, have not been studied in an attempt to call attention to distinct points of convergence and divergence between these two thinkers. I find reading Kierkegaard alongside Girard to be beneficial to both Kierkegaardians and Girardians—these considerations shed an important light on the complexity of Kierkegaard’s engagement of mimesis and expose Girard scholars to an important yet largely ignored precursor of his thought. Kierkegaard, as I argue, is especially important in that context as he challenges Girard on his claim that our awareness of the mechanisms of mimetic desire and scapegoating are the key to largely freeing ourselves from them. Christ represents for Girard the conscious victim who, by voluntarily sacrificing his life for the sake of humanity, stops the perpetuation of violence by cancelling the desire for retribution. Christ is the model for imitation if we want to avoid the dangers of mimetic desire. Yet as I have argued in Chapters 4 and 5, Kierkegaard demonstrates the inherent difficulties in the imitation of Christ. Moreover, Kierkegaard is rather skeptical of the cognitive power over the unconscious. His reflections on our limited immunity from affectivity, such as in the example of Mynster, should motivate Girard scholars to search for more adequate forms of resistance to affective mimesis. In the last chapter of this book, I offer one way to mitigate the problem of affective mimesis by exploring what I term existential mimesis in Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard identifies such distinct social beings as the crowd and public. He also refers in his writings to “the human race” (CA: 25–29/SKS 4: 332–336) and “humanity *in abstracto*” (SUD: 31/SKS 11: 147), “generation” and “the present age” (TA: 84/SKS 8: 81), the majority and the people (WA: 229/Pap. IX B 24), Christendom, and a number of political and social entities.⁶ His conceptualizations lack systematicity, and the meanings behind concepts often overlap. While he attributes similar elements to the crowd and the public, the former has a distinctly anonymous character and suggests spontaneous gatherings of people; the public is being formed around a particular idea or value and does not need physical proximity to generate the power of influence. A readership of a newspaper, the advent of which Kierkegaard has felt personally on his own skin, is an example of a public. Kierkegaard also attributes a number of anthropomorphic characteristics to social beings such as sagacity,

presumptuousness, as well as some disparaged human phenomena such as chatter, nosiness, hyper reflection, or business.

Kierkegaard's distinction between crowds and publics and his analysis of the press largely prefigure Tarde's observations about modern society. Nidesh Lawtoo (2013) skillfully situates Tarde's systematic scholarly work on the crowd, the public, and the press against Gustave Le Bon's prominent assertion that "our age is the 'age of the crowds'"; rather, we are living in "the age of the public and publics" (Lawtoo 2013: 104). Lawtoo explains:

It is true that the psychic disposition of the public is essentially the same as the crowd. What characterizes both social groups is a lack of rational control over one's opinions, credulity, vulnerability to emotional contagion, psychic suggestibility, and, more generally, an inclination for what Tarde calls imitation. And yet what distinguishes the public from the crowd is the fact that unconscious forms of imitation are no longer determined by physical proximity to others; they are no longer a matter of being swept off one's feet by the emotional contagion a physical mass generates.

(2013: 104–105)

What we see in the further exploration of the crowd, the public, and the press, and their interrelationships in Kierkegaard, is that the unobservable people bonding in the form of a dispersed crowd is as influential on the formation of collective identity as observable groupings of people. Furthermore, the public in the form of journalism and mass media is even more forceful and, in fact, more pernicious than crowds as it influences at a distance by creating public opinion shared by readerships and audiences. Public opinion does not only pertain to the cognitive aspect of shared information; it also creates a communal experience of sharing congenial information that reinforces the paradoxical bond of anonymity between people that is in effect detrimental to the communal life and social fabric.

While it has been argued extensively that Kierkegaard is not an anti-social thinker (Lappano 2017), he attributes a number of malaises that affect the modern subject to human sociality. His point is that, as has been indicated throughout this book, a human being is essentially an individual and all that makes him forget or abstract from this fact is essentially evil; deindividuation leads to inauthenticity. In his own words, "The idolized positive principle of sociality in our age is the consuming, demoralizing principle that in the thralldom of reflection transforms even virtues into *vitia splendida* [glittering vices]" (TA: 86/SKS 8: 82).

That principle of socializing and deindividuating, which Kierkegaard calls "leveling," is problematic for four main reasons. First, it lobbies for a consensual approach to the formation of values. Second, the negative

effects of leveling are not simply measured in the lowering of the bar for social norms, but in deindividualization and the building of a hostile environment for those who challenge such norms and the mechanism responsible for their formation. Third, leveling also affects those who willingly participate in it believing that, overall, it is beneficial for them. This is the case as the complexity of the mechanism of leveling and its detrimental consequences for all stakeholders are not readily detectable to those carrying it out. Fourth, building upon the previous points, leveling is a “force” that is being generated unbeknownst to those who willingly participate in this generation. At best, it is only detectible to its devotees on some levels, not all. In Kierkegaard’s words,

Leveling is not the action of one individual but a reflection-game in the hand of an abstract power. [T]he individual who levels others is himself carried along, and so on. While the individual egoistically thinks he knows what he is doing, it must be said that they all know not what they do, for just as inspired enthusiastic unanimity results in something more than is not individuals’, a something more emerges here also. A demon that no individual can control is conjured up, and although the individual selfishly enjoys the abstraction during the brief moment of pleasure in the leveling, he is also underwriting his own downfall.

(TA: 86/SKS 8: 82)

To describe this uncanny force of leveling, Kierkegaard is undoubtedly using a rather obsolete and nowadays questionable quasi-religious language. Undeniably, he perceives leveling as symptomatic of the modern spiritual crisis of faith and religious institutions; he responds to leveling with religious means by calling for a religious awakening (TA: 88–89/SKS 8: 84–85). Yet, his reflections also disclose a great attunement to a dimension of human functioning that emerges in collective environments of groupings and congregations. While he does not attempt a conceptual distinction between the psychology of individual and group psychology akin to those we find in Freud, Tarde, or Durkheim, Kierkegaard’s “something more that emerges” in collective environments captures the powerful “unknown” foreign to a post-Enlightenment positivistic reflection zooming in on human individuality. The leveling of the crowds is imperceptible to reflection that takes the collective as reducible to an aggregate of individuals. Human grouping and related phenomena are not generated merely by the voluntary entering into agreement to further common interests. On the contrary, sociability on a rudimentary level is often unplanned and unintentional—Kierkegaard calls it “this spontaneous combustion of the human race, produced by the friction that occurs when the separateness of individual inwardness in the religious life is omitted” (TA: 87/SKS 8: 83–84). In a draft of H.H.’s *Two*

Ethical-Religious Essays, which he finally decides to exclude from the final manuscript, Kierkegaard provides us with a description of the public and the crowd surprisingly aligned with modern and contemporary social theories. In this rarely quoted passage, Kierkegaard states that the public and the crowd are “a prodigious monstrosity with many heads ... a hundred-thousand-legged monster” that is “an irrational enormity, or an enormous irrationality that nevertheless has physical force ... whose enormous power cannot be defined humanly but can be more accurately defined as the power of a machine” (WA: 229/Pap. IX B 24).

Kierkegaard’s remarks about the crowd’s superficial knowledge of its own actions (“they all know not what they do”) and the uncanny force that awakens in the collective process (“a something more emerges here also. A demon ...”) bring us back to Tarde. As we have established in the case of Mynster, for Tarde humans operate largely on the affective, unconscious, and collective levels fundamental for human sociality. On the social level, we are largely predisposed to suggestion and hypnosis: “the social man [is] a veritable somnambulist” (Tarde 1903: 76). This radical idea, which for Tarde is the subject of the emerging discipline of “*sociological psychology* (which begins where physiological psychology leaves off)” (1903: 204), renders the collective existence as somehow immersed in a half-dream in which we are susceptible to contagion and suggestion from other members of society, especially the magnetization of extraordinary figures from the present and the past (1903: 77). “Both the somnambulist and the social man are possessed by the illusion that their ideas, all of which have been suggested to them, are spontaneous” (Tarde 1903: 77).

By this radical vision of human collectivity, Tarde wants to challenge Smith’s idea that the sharing of emotions is somehow conscious and consensual. “*Mutual imitation*, mutual prestige or *sympathy*, in the meaning of Adam Smith, is produced only in so-called waking life and among people who seem to exercise no magnetic influence over one another” (Tarde 1903: 79). By this Tarde means that such imitative emotions as *sympathy* are accounted for in philosophy by taking on board the conscious, reflective, and highly individualized view of humans. Smith erroneously takes the object of observation out of the social context in which emotional sharing is exercised. Undoubtedly, Kierkegaard’s sustained focus on human collectivity and the unconscious-affective position him as a transitory figure between Smith and Tarde, paving the way to the analysis of human affectivity present in the thought of theorists of affect such as Tomkins and Massumi.

The anonymous, abstracting, and spontaneous aspect of the crowd receives a more distinct characteristic in Kierkegaard’s concept of the public. He introduces this notion in *A Literary Review*. Commending the literary talent of Gyllembourg-Ehrensward and her ability to sustain excellent readership while not giving in to intellectual and literary fads

for the sake of keeping her readers interested in her works, Kierkegaard praises the public for recognizing her literary and authorial merits: “*And the reading public has been faithful to the author*” (TA: 16/SKS 8: 20). Yet, for the most part, the public is the object of his criticism. The public receives a distinctly pejorative meaning further on in the book, where Kierkegaard notices that the public can also gather around an idea or an objective that escapes any efforts of sustained scrutiny. In contrast to the virtues of the literary production of Gyllembourg-Ehrensward, one can hardly scrutinize and be held accountable for the production of the press, for Kierkegaard. Suspending for a moment the fact that Gyllembourg-Ehrensward’s works were published anonymously—she was in fact commonly considered to be a male author for much of her life—and that Kierkegaard himself published under numerous and confusing pseudonyms, his point is that the press produces highly impactful articles without specific authors who can be challenged and held accountable (JP 2: 2149/SKS 20: 153, NB2: 32). “The press wants to influence by means of coverage, but coverage is simply the power of the lie, a sensate power, like the power of fists” (JP 2: 2158/SKS 21: 183, NB8: 93). The readership of a newspaper is fundamentally volatile and represents for Kierkegaard the “human-swarm” and “confused mob” that hardly engages with content that requires any sustained intellectual effort in critically processing read opinions (JP 2: 1375/SKS 21: 76, NB7: 3). By providing room for demoralizing and often slanderous content, the press gathers readers around distressing and malicious ideas that provide them with a sense of collective identity generated by the magnitude of press coverage and circulation (JP 2: 2162/SKS 22: 62, NB11: 110).

The famous Corsair affair allowed Kierkegaard to feel the power of the press directly. After an initial critique from Kierkegaard for a problematic journalistic ethics and lack of professionalism, *The Corsair*, a Danish tabloid-like newspaper, launched a campaign of mockery and public shaming directed at Kierkegaard. Various caricatures and mocking opinions published by *The Corsair* instilled a negative public opinion about Kierkegaard as a person and author. In response to the affair, Kierkegaard expresses his disparagement of and denies his willingness to have “a public” that he calls a “phantasmic nonentity” (COR: 201/Pap. VII 1-B 70).

Qualifying the public as a phantom, “monstrous nonentity,” but also “a monstrous abstraction, an all-encompassing something that is nothing, a mirage” (TA: 90–91/SKS 8: 86), Kierkegaard points to the fact that it provides individuals with an illusory identity and community. While society should motivate individuals and assist them in finding an authentic life, an idea with which Kierkegaard would agree (albeit somewhat reluctantly), by mobilizing people around trivialities, the public is clearly steered away from topics of existential importance. Indeed, the public is especially present where “strong communal life” is absent. In such an environment thrives the press, which groups individuals together to

eventually deindividualize them, giving them a false sense of community. What bonds them is the fact that they follow the same medium; they do not form genuine relationships that require physical contact and the exchange of ideas. On an unprecedented scale, mass media nurture this sense of belonging among anonymous and mutually unknown people by creating the experience of simultaneous consumption of alike information that can rarely be adequately scrutinized and challenged. As Tarde says: “Men who are mutually suggestible in this way do not touch each other, nor do they see or hear each other: they sit, each one of them, at home, reading the same newspaper, scattered around a vast territory” (1989: 38; *translation following* Lawtoo 2013).

This deindividualization created by mass media and public opinion also dismantles responsibility. In Kierkegaard’s own words:

[T]he press create[s] this abstraction “the public,” made up of unsubstantial individuals who are never united or never can be united in the simultaneity of any situation or organization and yet are claimed to be a whole. The public is a corps, outnumbering all the people together, but this corps can never be called up for inspection; indeed, it cannot even have so much as a single representative, because it is itself an abstraction.

(TA: 91/SKS 8: 87)

Dispersed responsibility undermines individuality by taking away freedom, which requires that one is accountable for one’s actions. Through ostracism and ridicule, it pressures people to comply and adopt the opinion of the public. Motivated by fear of expulsion from communal life and exploiting the need for communal belonging, the press assimilates complying individuals to a group. The dispersion of individuality and responsibility encourages collective formations to violently deal with all opposition and criticism. In case things go south, all and none are held responsible.

This reasoning is confirmed in Kierkegaard’s journals where, evaluating the defects of the modern times—the present age or the age of reflection—he explains the mechanism of social assimilation by referring to social imitation: “In times of reflection it is frequently only fear of men which intimidates the individuals into being like the others; then abstractions like the public, which are actually ‘the others,’ become the tyrant” (JP 1: 1088/SKS 25: 48, NB26: 42). Being the tyrant, the public can exercise force over noncomplying individuals. Benefiting from and feeding on any kind of human fear is criticized by Kierkegaard as being “animalistic [*Dyriske*]” (JP 1: 83/SKS 26: 23, NB31: 30). Elsewhere, speaking of the necessity of practically returning to the category of the single individual, Kierkegaard indicates that becoming that individual is a risky business that can cost an arm and a leg:

[Th]e practice of [becoming a single individual] is always dangerous and at times may claim the lives of its practitioners. For the self-willed race and the confused crowds regard the highest, divinely understood, as high treason against “the race,” “the crowd,” “the public” etc.

(JP 2: 2004/SKS 20: 281, NB3: 77)

6.3.2 *Violence and Contagion*

Violence is a critical theme that runs throughout Kierkegaard’s authorship. It is a key part of such important and positively appraised issues as martyrdom and self-sacrifice. Both are for Kierkegaard the hallmarks of genuine Christianity. Fueled by envy, violence is also on the horizon of potentialities in admiration. The Danish actress Johanne Luise Heiberg from Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, after initially arousing admiration in her spectators, eventually, like a genius (discussed in Chapter 1) falls victim to “the power-craving crowd.” After becoming bored with her, the public turns Heiberg into an object of mutually shared contempt. Perceived as “uncooperative,” she is violently discarded like an obsolete object.⁷

Admiration can also produce violence against those who are unwilling to recognize a publicly admired person as worthy of respect. The aforementioned example of contagious admiration generated by the preaching of Bishop Mynster testifies to the power of collective emotions. A related passage from the same period on Mynster’s preaching demonstrates that those who are not convinced by Mynster’s preaching and want to follow a more radical version of Christianity may indeed contradict the preacher and reveal the dissonance between his preaching and the Christian requirement of suffering and martyrdom. Mynster’s preaching “veils, tones down, suppresses, omits some of what is most decisively Christian” (M: 16, 17/SKS 14: 137, 138). Eradication of the imitation of Christ from Christianity is “pure Mynsterism,” says Kierkegaard in his journal (JP 1: 1087/SKS 24: 507, NB25: 89). Mynster’s Christianity is an oxymoron, like “a virgin with a flock of children” (M: 18/SKS 14: 138).

Anyone attempting truth-witnessing, which demands from “*a follower of Jesus Christ ... to proclaim the doctrine [of Christianity] in poverty, in abasement, in renunciation of everything, in the most unconditional heterogeneity to this world, at the greatest distance from all use or assistance of worldly power,*” will collide with “the whole ecclesiastical established order,” not just with the single person of Mynster (M: 20/SKS 14: 141). Challenging Mynster’s authority means challenging the authority of the Danish Lutheran Church and those who represent it by, among other things, endorsing Mynster as the truth-witness.

As Mynster’s authority results from public admiration, and as it is solidified by such powerful institutions as the national church, challenging Mynster will not in fact stir his followers to reevaluate the merits

of his character and integrity. To the contrary. As we have learned, as a contagious emotion, admiration precedes merit; to maintain the *status quo*, the followers of Mynster will strive to do away with the Mynster's attacker, rather than taking it up with the bishop. Kierkegaard says:

But precisely when Mynster is most admired, in his most brilliant moments—precisely then he is, from a Christian point of view, most untrue. It is dreadful to imagine how this same crowd, which is silent with admiration, would rage against a poor mistreated apostle—who did what Mynster orates about.

(JP 3: 3499/SKS 23: 262, NB18: 16)

Mynster's example shows that human collectivity is not problematic for Kierkegaard just because it compromises human individuality. It is true that sociability is a highly imitative phenomenon that impinges on human authenticity and negatively affects the human spiritual dimension. Indeed, for Kierkegaard the difference between the individual and the crowd has spiritual underpinnings as it has been established by God (JP 2: 1825/Pap. XI 3-B 199). Yet, Kierkegaard also readily observes in collectivity an unprecedented potentiality for humans to cause violence *via* intimidation and physical harm. This worries him especially as the violence at stake has an affective, hence unconscious and imitative dimension.

The idea that Christ but also Socrates were collectively martyred is often expressed by Kierkegaard in his journals. For instance, criticizing the novelistic skill of Victor Hugo by accusing him of playing to the crowd, he asks rhetorically: "What tyrant, what idol is he worshiping with this speech? It is 'the crowd,' 'voting,' and the like. And has it claimed no sacrifices? It claimed Christ and Socrates and 'the host of martyrs'" (JP 1: 820/SKS 23: 41, NB15: 62). Kierkegaard's most sustained exposition of the formation and the functioning of affective violence is present in "Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?" This essay, accounts for the affective violence that put Christ to death and that is able to take away the life of a Christian who would like to become a martyr walking in Christ's footsteps. It offers an insight into mass psychology by explaining the mechanism of collective violence, which also largely anticipates Girard's theory of mimetic desire and scapegoating.

The essay starts with a claim that Christ was put to death because he refused to join either of two sociopolitical classes that desperately wanted him to acknowledge and endorse their ideals. This caused both classes to resent him: "For that very reason the lower class was just as indignant with him as the upper class, since each was pursuing its own interest and wanted him to join them in self-love" (WA: 59/SKS 11: 65). The building of the tension between Christ and the two classes was based on a preexisting conflict between these two classes: "The mighty hated him because

the people wanted to make him king, and the people hated him because he refused to be king" (WA: 60/SKS 11: 66). H.H. explains that Christ has failed the expectations of his contemporaries by refusing to take the role that was tailored for him to suit their needs. His rejection of that role "became the sting in their embitterment and made the rage of hate bloodthirsty when he then refused" (WA: 60/SKS 11: 66). His contemporaries were so fixed on ("infatuated" with) the idea that Christ was "the Expected One" that they made an idol out of Him ("they had comprehended his infinite superiority") (WA: 61/SKS 11: 66). His rejection made them "furious," which the author remarks four times in one sentence. Indicated among other things is their anger over their own mistake in the misidentification; to deal with it, they directed this anger toward Christ.

Another important angle that contributed to putting Christ to death pertains to the historical-political situation of the nation of Israel that shaped their national psyche, for H.H. The political subjugation of the Jews created in them a paradoxical blend of feelings of superiority and self-loathing. This conflicted sense of pride was enraged by Christ's refusal to fulfill his duty; his act was taken as "akin to treason against his contemporaries, against the nation, against the nation's cause" (WA: 62/SKS 11: 68). Christ then experiences in his life "the greatest possible human contrasts from elevation to abasement in such a short time" (WA: 63/SKS 11: 69). Such a complete reversal of action is possible because, as we have established, the emotion of admiration is in a Spinozian sense bound to its opposite, envy. Yet in the mass grouping, the alteration in the valence of emotions seems to take place at a much faster pace. From being summoned to be the king of the Jews, Christ is now the target of their hate and violence.

With the speed of the first impression of the extraordinary (wanting to make Christ king), the generation rushes straight to the opposite extreme, wanting to kill him—that is, from the *direct* expression for the extraordinary the generation rushes to the opposite expression for the extraordinary.

(WA: 62/SKS 11: 68)

The author of the essay emphasizes both the quickness with which the alteration of the crowd's relation to the extraordinary occurs, but also the fact that "wanting to make Christ king" and "wanting to kill him" are equally justifiable reactions of the crowd toward "the extraordinary." The quickness and the spontaneity of this altering reaction of the crowd suggests a kind of affective independence of that swing of valences on the pendulum of affectivity. Indeed, speaking of collective occurrences, Kierkegaard often uses such words as "rush," "upheaval," "raging." They indicate not only hastiness but also thoughtlessness and an uncontrollable discharge of force.

Despite its apparent dynamism, this collectivity of force that often takes the shape of mass political movement is for Kierkegaard “no action at all” (WA: 227/Pap. IX B 24). It is affective, unconscious, collective, and contagious because it transpires below the radar of awareness, will, and individual decision making. No noble action can, for Kierkegaard, have a collective composition, even if the cause seems to be deserving of praise (WA: 76/SKS 11: 80). The French Revolution, which resulted from the collective storming of the Bastille, transpired “without any acting personality who knows definitely beforehand what he wants, so that afterward he is able to say definitely whether what he wanted has occurred or not” (WA: 227/Pap. IX B 24). The European phenomenon of the Spring of Nations—or “The Age of Revolution” as it is termed in *A Literary Review*—is just a jumbled collection of “events” effected by people mutually imitating each other without any particular purpose:

Everything everywhere is an event, in many places an aping that even regarded as aping is not action, because again it is not an individual who apes something foreign and now in his own country is acting—no, the aping quite correctly consists in a kind of commotion that arises, God knows how-and then something happens.

(WA: 227/Pap. IX B 24)

Praising the social changes that occurred in mass revolutions is rarely meritorious because it lacks clear standards for verifying such events’ success. Rather, people swept up by the moment eventuating mass movements are prone to explain away the result, deluding themselves that what has been achieved was planned and is desired.

Such *post factum* justification of actions that stemmed from overexcitement of the moment is in stark contrast to Kierkegaard’s conception of freedom which, as we have established, requires individual responsibility. A sustained reflection on spontaneous mass actions demonstrates that they are indeed like infectious diseases, which can never be justified as something positive and welcomed. In his own words:

But that the upheaval occurs and has occurred in such a way is again the old evil, this shoving of responsibility away from oneself, forced, to be sure, into something big on such a scale that finally existence must assume the paternity for what occurs in the world of free rational beings, somewhat as in nature, so that these upheavals are to be regarded meaninglessly and inhumanly as natural phenomena, and thus revolutions and republics arise in quite the same sense as there is cholera.

(WA: 228/Pap. IX B 24)

Kierkegaard’s great interest in and knowledge of illnesses would surprise many. He witnessed firsthand an epidemic of cholera in Copenhagen in

the period June 12–October 1 that killed almost 5,000 people in 1853; his brother Peter Christian was “seriously ill” with typhus in 1835 (Watkin 2010: 44). In *Postscript*, Kierkegaard writes about vaccination in the context of half-truth and compromised Christianity that needs “a radical cure,” not “half-measures” (CUP1: 294/SKS 7: 268). “Sickness” is literally incorporated into the title of his pseudonymous *The Sickness unto Death*, and the subjects of the relation between a patient and a doctor and of treatment are densely featured there and throughout many of his pseudonymous and signed works. The heavily contagious aspect of the reference to cholera in relation to mass political actions comes to light when related to a striking reference in his late writings: “One person is enough to give a whole city cholera” (M: 252/SKS 13: 308). No wonder that Kierkegaard recommends nipping contagion in the bud, even using a form of force. His measures would suggest a kind of lockdown. It is obvious to him that when someone is affected by this highly infectious disease, that person needs to be guarded and forced to stay put using power. This we see in *Stage’s on Life’s Way*, where the pseudonymous author of “In Vino Veritas,” William Afham, states that “when there is cholera, a soldier is stationed outside the house” (SLW: 38/SKS 6: 41).

H.H.’s description of Christ’s death at the hands of the crowd resonates with Girard’s account of collective violence. Christ represents “an innocent person” for both thinkers and the violence of crowds has a sacrificial dimension (WA: 64/SKS 11: 70; Girard 1986: 122, 198–202). The victimhood of Christ takes place in a society plagued by crises and takes the shape of a scapegoat who unites opposing sides of a conflict around the persecuted figure. Indeed, Kierkegaard talks about the death of Christ as uniting both “the mighty” and “the people” (WA: 60/SKS 11:66). Girard presents the Gospels as revealing that scapegoats are “the spontaneous agents of reconciliation, since, in the final paroxysm of mimeticism, they unite in opposition to themselves those who were organized in opposition to each other by the effects of a previous weaker mimeticism” (Girard 1986: 166). Kierkegaard and Girard indicate that the killing of the innocent victim can be exercised by an unprompted mob of people, but also by human collectives that are organized around an idea (WA: 68/SKS 11: 73; Girard 1986: 89–90, 139–140).

Yet for Kierkegaard the scapegoated person is not oblivious to the victimary mechanism that person participates in. In stark difference to Girard’s theory, for Kierkegaard the crowd’s collective violence is partially caused by the victim. Kierkegaard’s martyr is someone who incites violence by fueling the passionless crowd with negative emotions. H.H. makes it clear in the essay:

It is not the age that is to have the energy to put someone to death or make him a martyr; it is the martyr, the prospective martyr, who is

to have the energy to give the age passion, in this case the passion of indignation, to put him to death.

(WA: 79/SKS 11: 83)

The martyr is a conscious victim who voluntarily incites the collective to put him to death (“*the voluntary collaboration in one’s own death*, which is the real self-sacrifice for the truth”; WA: 70/SKS 11: 75). This death-drive on the part of the martyr is not something that one cherishes as an end in itself; it is the truth that the martyr is committed to expressing in their life by “witnessing” it, and this self-sacrificing truth-witnessing is the inciting element to violence:

“If I jack up the definition of truth even higher, such as it truly is for me, then this will lead to my death; the end must be that either the government or the people (whichever of these two powers he now relates to) will put me to death.”

(WA: 71/SKS 11: 76)

In this chapter I have attempted a systematic presentation of the role of mimesis in Kierkegaard’s conceptualization of such moral emotions as sympathy/empathy and admiration. I have also brought forth the way mimesis is operative in the individual-collective of his sociopolitical thought. As I have argued, especially the affective dimension of mimesis contributes to human contagious behaviors that render us inauthentic by diminishing our capacity to act freely, but also to the annihilation of human individuality in process of standardizing socialization. Kierkegaard’s affective admiration forces us to rethink the objects of our respect as it questions the moral and epistemological reliability of admiration. Kierkegaard cautions us that, on the one hand, *what* and *who* we value as deserving praise may in fact result from collective suggestibility and peer pressure. On the other hand, he points to the fact that, while frequently analyzed in separation, our emotions are experienced as being intertwined with other, often opposing emotions. The scholarly work that has been accomplished here, which predominantly focuses on the negative influence of mimesis on the genuineness of human existence, leads to the concluding chapter of this book that presents a positive concept of mimesis that can successfully address the identified malaises of the modern man.

Notes

- 1 For a more comprehensive, historically oriented theoretical analysis of affect and affectivity, see Werhs (2017).
- 2 “The poet’s representation amounts to a kind of physical pointing that grips and involves those present ... People often describe the immediate physical effects of such an oral poetic presentation as a contagion—a series of

- elementary mimetic processes by which listeners achieve a sameness with one another and which spreads epidemically” (Gebauer and Wulf 1995: 47).
- 3 Important work has recently been dedicated to tracking and reconstructing the genealogies of affect theory it tracks (Stanley 2017: 97–112).
 - 4 Krause calls the first type of sympathy (S1) and the second (S2). See also Scudder (2020: 55).
 - 5 See De Vignemont and Singer (2006); Hurley and Chater (2005); Haidt and Seder (2009); and Immordino-Yang and Sylvan (2010).
 - 6 TA: 90/SKS 8: 86: “An approximate leveling can be accomplished by a particular social class or profession, for example, the clergy, the middle class, the farmers, by the people themselves, but all this is still only the movement of abstraction within the concretions of individuality.”
 - 7 It is not hard to miss a repetition of that pattern in Kierkegaard’s relation to Mynster. A number of his references to Mynster are positive and demonstrate his reverence for and admiration of Mynster (Cf. JP 5:5408/SKS 18: 57, EE: 165; JP 6: 6693/SKS 24: 74, NB21: 122). Mostly late references in journals and newspaper articles and pamphlets from *The Moment* indicate Kierkegaard’s vicious, personally motivated attack on Mynster during his life but especially after his death (Cf. JP 6: 6795/SKS 24: 499–501; JP 6: 6954/Pap. XI3 B 93; M: 15/SKS 14: 133).

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7 Comparison, Existential Mimesis, Authenticity

The sheer fact that humans are imitative creatures allows for the creation of culture and to a large extent our morality and identity. Imitation “works” because we are all similar. As we learn from the sociologists Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon, imitation is at the foundation of human society. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard notices with respect to the social imitation that it can also make us similar to a degree that is problematic for our sense of individuality and authenticity. Social pressure, human collectivity, and affective contagion are perceived by Kierkegaard as direct threats to human uniqueness and sovereignty that are at the foundation of his vision of authentic existence. These phenomena are caused by the influence of mimesis on the human individual and communal life. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, we are inauthentic because we strive to be like others, we follow fashions, we relish existing *en masse* rather than conforming to the overdemanding ideal of human singularity; we are affective, prone to suggestion and sympathetic behaviors, and we enjoy hanging out with like-minded people because we love our echo chambers. The lack of authenticity in our lives is caused by the diminished sense of freedom in our actions that are motivated, if not instigated, by our imitation of others.

This concluding chapter has three sections. They explicate the moral-psychological dimension of Kierkegaard’s critical appraisal of imitation in humans, propose a novel conceptualization of mimesis in Kierkegaard that responds to problems caused by mimesis presented throughout this book, and offer a positive vision for human authenticity. The first section, “Difference and Comparison,” demonstrates the fundamentally mimetic underpinnings of the categories of difference and comparison in Kierkegaard’s thought. By situating difference in Kierkegaard in the intellectual context of his times, I read this concept as his reaction to a dangerous philosophical trend that negatively affects the individual, social, and spiritual dimensions of human life. An inevitable consequence of the elimination of difference is found in Kierkegaard’s conceptualization of comparison. As I argue, it is a deeply mimetic notion that captures the

human propensity to engage in continuous estimation and valuation of one's identity and norms in relation to other people. Reading this concept alongside Social Comparison Theory reveals the largely noncognitive dimension of moral and non-moral motivation generated by comparison.

The second section introduces a concept of existential mimesis that successfully responds to the problem of human inauthenticity understood as being primarily caused by mimesis. My work here is largely reconstructive and, in some respects, moves beyond Kierkegaard. I treat his remarks about positive and negative facets of mimesis as a resource that allows for a formulation of a distinct conceptualization of mimesis that is coherent with his existential project and that successfully addresses the malaises of the modern man to which mimesis is a contributing factor. The project of existential mimesis comprises five positive attributes of mimesis that I find in Kierkegaard; it is nonimitative, non-comparing, and refigurative, but also indirect and intention-driven/goal-oriented.

The last section of this chapter, "Authenticity," wrestles with two important notions from Kierkegaard's mimetic vocabulary, habit and primitivity, explicitly discussed in relation to the ideal of human authenticity. My exposition of habit focuses on bringing to light the mimetic foundations of his criticism of this notion. Habit makes us inauthentic by gradually changing the meaning of actions performed through repetition and altering the motivation behind these actions. Kierkegaard appraises primitivity as being at the core of human individual existence that marks human authenticity. Primitivity does not designate something undeveloped, but is a property that qualifies a creative engagement with the world. That type of primitive creativity represents Kierkegaard's ideal of authentic existence.

7.1 Difference and Comparison

As has been argued successively by scholars, and indicted in the present investigation, Kierkegaard does not oppose the communal life, nor does he absolutely reject similarity between humans (Chapter 6). In fact, he ascribes to humans an unconditional equality before God that nullifies differences of station, wealth, and education between people, what he calls "the temporal dissimilarities of the worldly" (WL: 69/SKS 9: 75). To define the tension between similarity and dissimilarity between people, Kierkegaard engages the notion of "difference." Its importance is projected by Kierkegaard to the realm of Christian religion; it also regulates the secular sphere of the individual-collective. Difference, charged with historical baggage and strong mimetic connotations, is the fundamental point of departure for his subsequent conceptualization of such concepts as primitivity and comparison operative in the sacred and the profane of human life.

7.1.1 *Difference*

Similarity and difference are important elements within many if not all spheres of human life. They qualify our existence in its individual and communal, private and public, secular and religious spheres. We are similar, but we are also different on many levels. We are different from nature by virtue of our ability to reflect. We have also the spiritual dimension, something that animals and plants do not possess, according to Kierkegaard. We are also similar to God. Following Anti-Climacus in his famous introduction from *The Sickness unto Death* and Kierkegaard in his journals, both a human being and God are spirit(s). Speaking of the possibility of a Christian to relate to God, for instance, Kierkegaard indicates that in the imitation of Christ, Christ draws us into Himself, and this is through a shared spiritual dimension—"spirit draw[s] spirit to itself" (PC: 160/SKS 12: 164). Spirit is also the indicator of our difference from God; it is the spiritual category of sin that posits the absolute difference between us and God. Hence, in Christ we are simultaneously like and unlike God. Hence, similarity and difference must be understood dialectically for Kierkegaard.

This idea of the dialectical linkage between likeness and unlikeness appears already in an early journal entry from 1845, where Kierkegaard states "the religious man admires God, who is of course the absolutely different [*Forskjellige*] but still is that with whom he ought to have likeness [*Lighed*] through absolute unlikeness [*Ulighed*]" (JP4: 4430/SKS 18: 272, JJ: 395). Abstracting here from the fact that Kierkegaard uses "admiration" in this context, the point I would like to draw on is that our relationship to God should presuppose the fact that, first and foremost, God is absolutely different from us. That "quality" makes God essentially ungraspable and unintelligible to us.

Kierkegaard's engagement with likeness, unlikeness, and difference does not appear in *vacuo*. Fervently discussed by the intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is the ideal of a reconciliation of opposites that are found both in nature and human culture, but that are also constituted by these two opposing realms. At play were the concepts of *idem at alter* and *idem in alio*, of which the main idea was a belief in a certain oneness and wholeness that unifies the manifold parts and properties of the world. This line of thought inevitably reconceptualized mimesis after the marginalization of difference in the relation between original and copy, and subject and object. Following Burwick, the Romantics attempted to reconcile

the traditional opposition of mind and matter by grounding [philosophy] in the cognitive union of subject and object. If imitation is to represent objectively the phenomena of subjective experience, then it must somehow counter its own objective form. In romantic

aesthetics ... mimesis was understood as a transformation in which an essential sameness is retained in spite of the otherness of its material mediation.

(2001: 50)

This demand for reconciliation responded to the Platonic heritage where the mimetic legacy conveyed the opposition of imitation of ideal form and of the process of thought. Schleiermacher's and Hegel's deliberations over the relation between identity and difference have their fundamentals precisely in their endeavors to reconcile form and thought. For these thinkers, "The union of form and thought in the creative process ... is identity in difference" (Burwick 2001: 50).

Without venturing into a more detailed presentation of that complex phenomenon, which itself entails various notions of antinomies such as gradable, complementary, and relational,¹ it is important to notice that difference contributed to reformulations of some key concepts in theology, philosophy, and the arts, but also influenced the conceptualization of sciences in a broader sense. The spirit of that time is readily discernable in Samuel Coleridge's journal entry, where, drawing on the Classics, the German Romantics, and the works of Hegel, he writes:

The Dyad is the essential form of Unity, the integral *one* would be put half manifest, in a single Pole—the manifested, i.e. realized One, therefore ipso termino, *exists* in and by self-duplication each duplicated being an Integer, and an Alter at Idem, and the real Image of the other.

(Coleridge 2002: 4829)

As a consequence of these "unifying" trends, God, from being *ipse sui similis* and *aliorum dissimilis*, is being translated into the one that is different but similar, which means that his difference is qualified by his similarity rendered *via negativa*. Hence, God's difference is far from being absolute but is indeed relative to what God is different from, such as nature, people, culture, and thought (reason).

Kierkegaard's "difference" responds to the intellectual trend, which, in his mind, affects not only the tenets of critical philosophy, by crossing the boundary of what can be known by reason ("the abandonment of Kant's honorable way"; JP1: 649/27: 390, Papir 365: 2), but also theology (CA: 3/SKS 4: 310). When Climacus says in the *Postscript* that no difference makes any difference, he refers to the fact that the nineteenth century in particular abandoned difference by reformulating it into something else—what is left is an empty concept (CUP1: 356/SKS 7: 325). Annulling difference, we eradicate the gap between humans and God, effectively contracting them into one entity. Kierkegaard approaches this problem dialectically, knowing that the haphazard conceptualization of

“difference” can, on the one hand, substitute it with something relative and similar. As Mark C. Taylor puts it, Kierkegaard “asks how difference itself can be articulated without reducing it to the same” (1987: 342). On the other hand, Kierkegaard is trying to avoid proposing a view of the radical otherness of God. It would assume that Christianity deludes its adherents into believing that relationship with God is in fact possible.

Kierkegaard shows that God’s difference is indiscernible *via* reason; it comes to us by revelation. Following Louis Mackey’s rendering of Climacus’s “difference” in *Philosophical Fragments*,

The absolutely different is indistinguishable from the absolutely same. There is no mark by which it may be known and therefore none by which it may be discriminated. The other-than-reason is that which in principle is contained in no rational category and which nonetheless is categorized as nonrational by this statement.

(Mackey 1986: 204)

By virtue of this understanding, Climacus says in *Philosophical Fragments*, “the god has become the most terrible deceiver through the Reason’s deception of itself”² that it can break through the difference of God (PF: 46/SKS 4: 250; modified using Swenson’s translation of *Forstanden*). Since we can only know the true difference through revelation, difference is both a philosophical and a deeply religious category.

Speaking of the importance of difference for Christianity, Kierkegaard states in *Works of Love* that this category is in fact that which Christianity embraces and that which defines Christians. Christians must also know how to relate to relative difference, what he calls “the dissimilarity of earthy life.” While the Christian religion does not take away “the dissimilarity of earthy life [*Jordlivets Forskjellighed*] ... as long as temporality continues ... by being a Christian he does not become exempt from dissimilarity [*Forskjelligheden*], but by overcoming the temptation of dissimilarity [*Forskjellighedens Fristelse*] he becomes a Christian” (WL: 70/SKS 9: 77). Overcoming the temptation of dissimilarity means for a Christian pursuing the true difference that is in the spiritual world, not in the temporal world of relative differences. The dissimilarity of earthy life is essentially a matter of intensity, gradation, and approximation characterizing relative difference.

Triumphing over the enticement of difference in the earthly life does not mean that we should not pursue difference from others in the temporal world. In fact, this is something that a religious life is based on. “Spirit is precisely: not to be like others,” writes Kierkegaard in an appendix to the concluding number of his self-published magazine *The Moment* (M: 344/SKS 13: 408). Not being like others means for Kierkegaard a way of life characterized by what he radically calls “the segregation of singularity” that separates an individual from masses (M: 344/SKS 13: 408). It is

not a static qualification of a negative relation between individuals, but a life-view that makes the transcendent immanent by defining the spiritual using philosophical and sociological notions. By “not to *be* like others,” Kierkegaard in fact means not *being* like others, which is a mode of existence that, as he refers to his own example in life, means “never to be able to run with the crowd” (M: 344/SKS 13: 408).

These final words of Kierkegaard demonstrate the robust entanglement of the religious and the nonreligious in this thought. They also indicate a change of accents in Kierkegaard’s appraisal of the intertwining of the two worlds, the sacred and the profane. In contrast to *Works of Love*, where the eternal makes living a life extracted from social imitation possible (“Without the eternal, one lives with the help of habit, sagacity, aping [*Efterbelse*], experience, custom and usage”; WL: 251/SKS 9: 250), the mode of existence that is defined by difference in *The Moment* is presented by Kierkegaard as the motivation “in imitation to become a sacrifice,” to which a Christian is invited by Christ (M: 345/SKS 13: 409).

7.1.2 Comparison

In our attempt to not be like others, we may in fact do what we want to avoid. While practicing the life-view of difference, a genuine Christian should be aware that engaging difference may go awry if it is improperly understood. Christianity, as Kierkegaard says, does not preoccupy itself with distinguishing “dissimilarity between difference and difference, this comparing dissimilarity” (WL:71/SKS 9: 78). Introducing the category of comparison, Kierkegaard distinguishes genuine difference from one that is at risk of being compromised by the human propensity to social imitation. The Danish for comparison is *Sammenligning*. It comprises the word *ligne*, likeness, and indicates a type of imitative relation to others. Comparison is a category from Kierkegaard’s moral psychology that accounts for the human reflective and affective imitative inclination to look for a relative point of reference to appraise a norm, value, or a state of affairs.

Most notably discussed in *Works of Love*, comparison is related to burning jealousy, compulsive anxious self-preoccupation, and a fragmentation of commitment. It characterizes “sickly loving” as opposed to love that stems from duty, hence it is one that “has gained enduring continuance, and it is self-evident that it exists” (WL: 32–34/SKS 9: 39–40). Genuine love self-evidently secures its quality of being love to the degree where one does not need to look outside of it, testing to make sure that it is indeed love. Kierkegaard appeals to comparison to portray the negative role of reflection in love. Reflecting on one’s love for the other, which Kierkegaard calls “love’s dwelling on itself,” alters the essential structure of love, reducing it to its truncated and diminished version. This happens when the self-relationality and self-sufficiency of love is compromised by being gauged or related to that which is external to it.

So it is also with love when it *finitely* dwells on itself or itself becomes an object, which more accurately defined is *comparison*. Love cannot *infinitely* compare itself with itself, because it infinitely resembles itself in such a way that this only means that it is itself ... All comparison requires the third factor, as well as likeness and unlikeness.

(WL: 182/SKS 9: 182)

The third factor that constitutes comparison in relation to love can occur in two versions. On the one hand, "Love in the individual person can compare itself with love of others"; on the other hand, one can start measuring the value of the acts of love committed out of love (WL: 182/SKS 9: 182–183). Engaging comparison in either way, one puts perilous stress on the integrality of love by introducing foreign elements to it; one also tampers with its nature by disturbing the movement of love. Reflection in love is as dangerous as stalling in planes; losing momentum, love dies, and one may end up eventually being out of love.

The problem of comparison is also applicable to other dimensions of human life that demand from us an unaltered attention and commitment. Analyzing the example of an enthusiast who is willing to sacrifice anything for the good, Kierkegaard points out that it is unadvisable for him to compare his efforts with those of others. In fact, it is important for one to always have in mind that the requirements of the ideal are always unreachable; one's comparison with the efforts of others will not have a positive influence on their motivation. Kierkegaard's psychological observation here is that we instinctually search for situations where we are rendered better off than those with whom we compare ourselves. On the other hand, we seek beneficial comparisons that attest to our worth because we want to be admired and respected for our achievements. To avoid the seduction of comparison, one needs to solely focus on their task and, following the words from Luke 10:4, "greet no one along the way."

The influence of the Gospel of Luke on Kierkegaard's moral and psychological evaluation of comparison cannot be understated. In "The Tax Collector" from *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, Kierkegaard discusses further the mimetic dimension of the two levels of comparison. He demonstrates that comparison must be comprehended in a dialectical manner because a one-sided approach to it can in fact reintroduce it into our "thinking," albeit on a more nuanced level. In that work, which is based on Luke 16, Kierkegaard focuses on the motivations and attitudes of two figures: a tax collector and a Pharisee. To their contemporaries, the former represents a despised figure of a traitor; the latter is a religious figure of an immaculate opinion. However, the Bible yields a different evaluation of these figures. We have the tax collector who God justifies and the Pharisee who leaves the place of their mutual meeting, the temple, accused by God. Interestingly, it is the Pharisee who

claims to be not like the other, but it is he who is “the hypocrite who deceives himself and wants to deceive God” (WA: 127/SKS 11: 263).

The Pharisee’s claim of being different from another is, as we learn from Kierkegaard’s reading of the Gospel’s story, in fact based on his adhering to “the criterion of human comparison” (WA: 129/SKS 11: 265). This is so, because the Pharisee uses other people as his point of reference in evaluating his spiritual condition. He is quick and sagacious in his evaluation of the relative difference in piety between himself and the commonly despised tax collector. In contrast, the tax collector casts down his gaze, and looks neither toward the sky nor to the sides, instead solely focusing on himself before God. Being before God, he is too humble to look up, and not interested in looking sideways. Abstaining from a horizontal gaze, he secures the intimacy of “standing by himself,” looking downwards and “staying far away,” the tax collector admits his sin and relies on God’s mercy.

On a more nuanced level, comparison is being “performed,” or “acted out” by shrewd readers of the story. It is clear to a general reader that the Pharisee is the negative figure in the story. Yet, Kierkegaard is worried that our identification with the antihero may not stem from a deeper reflection and recognition of the reason behind God’s judgment of these two figures. He states that although the readers “have chosen the tax collector as their prototype, ... [they] resemble the Pharisee [*der ligne Pharisæeren*]” (WA:127/SKS 11: 263). This is to say that in their choice to be like the tax collector, they imitate the motivations of the Pharisee. Kierkegaard pays attention here to the complexity of moral motivation regarding choices that seem at face value appropriate and genuine. The tax collector is indeed the correct exemplar here; yet, without a proper understanding of the intention behind the divine judgment, which is in the non-comparative motivation of the tax collector’s conduct, essentially the imitated model is the Pharisee. Hence, Kierkegaard negatively evaluates the readers who supposedly “fashion their character in the likeness [*Lighed*] of the tax collector,” but in fact become contaminated with comparison and “sanctimoniously say, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like this Pharisee’” (WA:127/SKS 11: 263). The exaggerated gestures of the readers of the story who react to the failed example of the Pharisee mimic the behavior of one they condemn and tacitly reveal that the actual imitated figure is not the tax collector. Condemning the Pharisee, they condemn themselves.

Kierkegaard’s vehement criticism of comparison has both religious and secular underpinnings. His insistence on the importance of approaching God “alone, alone in the place that is more solitary than the desert,” argued passionately in “The Tax Collector” but also across his entire authorship, demonstrates the intertwining of the spiritual and social in the concept of the single individual. Reading Kierkegaard in parallel with Social Comparison Theory reveals the affective dimension of comparison exemplified in his thought.

Social Comparison Theory studies how social interactions, culture, and specific environments shape the identity and values of individuals. It also pursues knowledge of how various techniques and processes can help alleviate social tension and resolve crises (Suls, Collins, and Wheeler 2020). While it has been successfully argued by Paul Carron (2019) that social comparison negatively influences the formation of emotions and virtues such as courage in Kierkegaard, I am focusing here on explicating the imitative component of social pressure in his thought that hitherto has not been systematically analyzed.

Kierkegaard's many critical references to the influence of the crowd on individuals pertain to what is called in social comparison literature horizontal and vertical comparison (Locke 2020). Vertical comparison runs upward and downward. Kierkegaard sees it at work in the class stratification that is symptomatic of modern times. Observing the life of people in the city of Copenhagen, Kierkegaard sees the paradoxical instance of unprecedented proximity and remoteness that amplifies vertical social comparison at work in people comparing themselves with others above and below their class. Growing social stratification becomes the roadblock for a functioning community:

the error is that people on the various levels of that life live too remote from one another. In the absence of close acquaintance with others, everything becomes too much a matter of comparison [*relativt*] and too rigid in its comparativeness [*Relativitet*].

(JP 1: 377/SKS 21: 37, NB 6:48)

This and other journal entries express Kierkegaard's care for society which, instead of growing on building relationships between people, develops through class ascendancy (JP 6: 6498/SKS 22: 250–251, NB12: 178; see also UDVS: 189/SKS 8, 286–287). To succeed in being a good citizen, such as Jude Wilhelm from *Either Or 2*, one must marry and seek out a respected form of employment. To be among the elite, one needs to follow fashion and frequent the theater and parties that gather intellectuals and the people of culture such as Heiberg, Andersen, Mynster.

Horizontal comparison in Kierkegaard pertains to the social influence on the formation of values and beliefs. What it means to be a human being in modernity is not a question of subjective-Socratic investigation, but of the observations of others:

If I were to imagine a human being who was brought up in such a manner and lived out his life in such a manner that he never got any impression of himself but always lived by adaptation and comparison—this would be an example of dishonesty. And this is precisely the state of affairs in modern times.

(JP1: 654/SKS 27: 417, Papir 369)

Social adaptation and comparison shape the sense of selfhood and identity of a modern subject, effectively distorting the original image of God in humans. This original image is embedded in Kierkegaard's ideal of primitivity that must be maintained by an individual and whose cultivation is a part of the existential task (JP 1: 214/SKS 24: 444–445, NB25: 11). The human desire to outsource that image from others is a sign of moral decay and social disintegration that abridges differences between people and frustrates human potential. "But as soon as men become indolent and seek indulgence, they promptly escape into sociality, where the standard is relative, comparison [*comparativ*] with others, and man is an animal species" (JP 2: 2010/SKS 21: 128, NB7: 97). To this he quickly adds: "We think that by attaching ourselves to society we develop a higher perfection—that is a nice idea, but no, it is retrogression!"

Social comparison in Kierkegaard has a deeply affective dimension. It is, using the conceptual apparatus of René Girard, oriented toward the imitation of the desires of others. We see the interplay of comparison and desire in Kierkegaard's two tales from *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* about a lily plucked up by a bird and a wood-dove that relinquishes the safety of being in the wild. The first tale presents the lily that is seduced and conditioned by a befriended bird to desire what the bird desires. The bird maims the lily with stories that make it eventually question its meaning and worth. The internal dialogue of the lily testifies to its preoccupation with comparison.

"And then to look as inferior as I do," said the lily to itself, "to be as insignificant as the little bird says I am—oh, why did I not come into existence some other place, under other conditions, why did I not become a Crown Imperial!"

(UDVS: 168/ SKS 8: 267–268)

The seed of worry planted in her by the bird led her to allowing herself to be uprooted from her original environment and eventually left to die.

In the second tale, the wood-dove wants to be like a domesticated dove, acting against its wild nature and pretending to be what it is not. After a chance meeting with a pair of tame doves, the wood-dove becomes worried about the security of its future. Although it has what it needs to nourish itself on a daily basis, it is so seduced by the idea of stored food that it convinces itself that such food is necessary; this conviction stems from its comparison with tame doves. "After all, I am not asking for something unreasonable," it said, "or for something impossible; I am not asking to become like the wealthy farmer but merely like one of the wealthy doves" (UDVS: 176/SKS 8: 275). Eventually, the wood-dove is captured by a man and killed.

These stories make similar points illustrating three levels on which comparison is destructive for the selfhood: it alters the self by making

it inauthentic (alteration of nature); it alters our faith (the lily and the wood-dove start to worry about beauty and food security, respectively); and it alters society (abolition of differences between different species in the story). These tales also offer an insight into Kierkegaard's moral psychology of social comparison. They demonstrate that our motivations to act, which we experience as based on cognitive analysis, are often generated by passions such as desire and envy. Moreover, comparison is something that conditions not just individuals, but also groups of people, and is being unconsciously carried over through generations. Although undetectable to conscious reflection, comparison accomplishes its work of depriving an individual of their actual needs and undermining the authenticity and well-being of a person. This is reiterated by Kierkegaard in the second discourse from the series, where he says:

The one human being compares [*sammenligner*] himself with others, the one generation compares [*sammenligner*] itself with the other, and thus the heaped-up pile of comparisons [*Sammenligningernes*] overwhelms a person. As the ingenuity and busyness increase, there come to be more and more in each generation who slavishly work a whole lifetime far down in the low underground regions of comparisons [*Sammenligningernes*].

(UDVS: 189/SKS 8: 286–287)

7.2 Existential Mimesis

As we have just established, the mimetic phenomenon of comparison, nourished by the intellectual efforts to eradicate the category of difference, influences the individual and the communal lives of human beings. Comparison has an affective dimension that operates on the register of the unconscious. It has implications in the sphere of religion. Comparison is also transcultural and transgenerational. Kierkegaard's moral psychology of comparison is part of this larger project of identifying aspects of human life disturbed by mimesis and diagnosing the ways in which mimesis is operative in them. The previous chapter of this book has shown the affective and collective facets of moral emotions that should make us alert to the secondary role of reasoning with respect to moral motivations. Chapters 4 and 5 provide readers of Kierkegaard with a perspective on his attempts to conceptually distinguish positive and negative imitation and to navigate the complexity of mimetic models by which imitation is beneficial to the imitator.

This section introduces the category of existential mimesis that I present as a response to the illnesses of the modern man that are produced or enhanced by mimesis. The conceptualization that I am putting forward is an effect of a synthetic work of combining a number of Kierkegaard's

positive aspects of mimesis and showing how working in synergy they are able to respond to problems that have been identified by Kierkegaard as resulting from the functioning of mimesis in humans. To achieve this goal, I have translated several of Kierkegaard's positive formulations of mimesis uttered primarily in the religious context into the sphere of the nonreligious context of human life in which Kierkegaard articulates most of his criticisms of mimesis. Existential mimesis successfully addresses Kierkegaard's developed criticism of mimesis, as well as some issues that are merely signaled in respect of the negative effects of mimesis on the life of the modern subject.

I am using the term "existential" to indicate the fact that Kierkegaard understands and conceptualizes human existence, individual and communal, spiritual and secular, as being essentially related to mimesis. This view of the fundamental role of mimesis in human life has both philosophical and religious underpinnings. Kierkegaard's conception of ethics and practical life are strongly linked with mimesis (Kaftanski 2020); he also endorses the Christian vision of humans as created in the image of God (JP 2: 1614/SKS 23: 63, NB15: 91).

Presenting mimesis as a remedy to the problems caused by mimesis may come as a surprise to some. Indeed, the previous chapter especially may form an impression in the reader that Kierkegaard's remarks on mimesis, though sharp, insightful, and surprisingly accurate, paint a rather negative view of the influence of mimesis on human existence. Expectedly so, many Kierkegaard scholars suggest that imitation in humans is the main culprit of human inauthenticity. Our inauthenticity is caused by our "natural" inclination to collective and sympathetic behaviors and our concern for being perceived in a particular way by society. These aspects also curtail our freedom; society impinges upon a range of possibilities of acting and being in the world.

Yet mimesis is both the problem and the cure for Kierkegaard. It is so because he reads mimesis as a *pharmakos*. Existential mimesis in Kierkegaard is, using the words of Simon Critchley, "a meta-*mimesis*, an imitative antidote to imitation" (2019: 138). Kierkegaard's pharmacological reading of mimesis goes back to Plato's *Phaedrus*, but it is also in line with such modern thinkers as Nietzsche, Derrida, Girard, and Lacoue-Labarthe. Kierkegaard's essentially dialectical reading of the mimetic *pharmakos* has five features: it is "nonimitative," refigurative, and non-comparing, but also indirect and concerned with ends rather than means.

7.2.1 Nonimitative, Non-Comparing, and Refigurative Mimesis

The first three facets of existential mimesis in Kierkegaard pertain to its quality of being "nonimitative," non-comparing, and refigurative. Except for the "non-comparing" quality of mimesis, which has been treated *via negativa* in the first part of this chapter, the other two have

been reviewed at length throughout this book. I will then briefly return to all three, focusing on their respective meanings within the context of existential mimesis.

The “nonimitative” facet of existential mimesis has a deep moral sense. It means a state of not being disposed and predisposed to deceiving oneself and others into thinking that one is someone other than who one truly is by pretending to be someone else or misrepresenting oneself. Existential mimesis is “nonimitative” because it characterizes a person who does not pass oneself off as another. My understanding of mimesis as “nonimitative” draws on J. Tate’s appraisal of imitation in Plato’s *Republic*, as discussed in Chapter 4. The main idea I take from Tate is that the problem with the “imitativeness” of imitation in Plato pertains to the fact that it opens the possibility for an individual to “be” someone other than who one truly is, and in consequence to deceive others into believing the untruth. This situation occurs when a dishonest person engages imitation in order to “be” whoever they want to be and seduces others into thinking that their mode of existing is genuine. An unethical person, as Plato maintains, and someone who is deeply wrong about their selfhood, what Kierkegaard calls despair, will gladly pass themselves off as another person, not just by error of judgment (Plato) but willfully (Kierkegaard). Hence, as we learn from Plato, the guardians must limit themselves to undertaking a “restricted” type of “nonimitative imitation” that takes one’s ideal self as the model of imitation. The authentic human being must emulate in his own person the model for their best self, which, as we will see later, Kierkegaard encapsulates in his notion of primitivity. Kierkegaard confirms the importance of the ethical element in this Platonic intuition in his 1845 journal entry:

The esthetic-sensuous man admires the strange, that which has no relation to himself; the ethical man admires what has an essential likeness [*Lighed*] to himself—the great, that which can be the prototype [*Forbilledede*] of what he himself ought to be.

(JP4: 4430/SKS 18: 272, JJ:395)

By “making oneself as another,” one frustrates the ethical confines of genuine imitation, hence professing “the imitative type” of imitation.

The weakness of this approach to imitation is in its focus on the cognitive and epistemological element that presupposes the agent’s ability to reflectively choose between the two types of imitation. Knowledge of the genuine type of imitation and of the characteristics that are suitable for the guardians to fulfill their role is required to make the Platonic model work. As we have already demonstrated in the present study, it is the affective and largely unconscious factors that “persuade” us to engage in various imitative behaviors, some of which may have the mark on inauthenticity. We compare ourselves with others, we desire what others

desire, we sympathize with them; we are often swept off our feet by mimetic affects and emotional contagion such that we admire those who we recognize as meritless. We cannot fully trust our judgments as they often arrive after the fact to justify actions motivated by sagacity and jealousy or our unconscious desires.

What responds to this problem is Kierkegaard's insistence that genuine imitation must be non-comparing. This feature of imitation emphasizes the role of human individuality and imagination in the formation of "the prototype of what he himself ought to be" and the importance of the (emotional and moral) investedness in that prototype. We learn from Anti-Climacus about the formation of the self (discussed in Chapter 3), as humans we are largely in charge of the creation of ourselves. As image makers, we engage reflection and imagination to create visions of our future self that guide the becoming of our actual self. The self has an ability to transcend itself in imaginative reflection, but its development progresses only if the self comes back to itself in that reflection. Although imagination goes beyond what is given, it is limited to the options that are truly possible to the self; otherwise, the self would be at risk of infinitization that causes the self to despair and disintegrate. The realization of the vision of the ideal self requires the individual to be invested in it.

This investment, while morally charged, need not be limited to the rational and cognitive; it can also be affective. Indeed, not all affective reactions disclose inauthenticity or falseness. Such examples as the tears of the woman who was a sinner demonstrate Kierkegaard's positive valuation of a number of affective reactions. The woman's weeping is a sign of her genuine love for Christ. The thought process that led her to Christ and that motivated her to her actions is not emphasized in Kierkegaard:

"She sits at his feet, anoints them with the ointment, wipes them with the hair of her head, kisses them—and weeps." She says nothing and therefore is not what she says, but she is what she does not say, or what she does not say is what she is.

(WA: 141/SKS 11: 227)

Her actions and affective reactions made her into "the symbol, like a picture" that sets a new standard for the imitation of Christ.

The critical dissimilarity between the weeping woman and "The esthetic-sensuous man [who] admires the strange, that which has no relation to himself" (JP4: 4430/SKS 18: 272, JJ: 395) is in the value of absolute investedness in that which makes absolute difference for her in relation to Christ, the forgiveness of sins. She achieves "likeness through the absolute unlikeness" with Christ who can forgive her sins as he is "absolutely different" from her. Although she approaches Christ amongst the crowd of people—bystanders and the Pharisees—she is alone; she approaches Christ in a non-comparing manner, accomplishing something

rather unconventional that expresses and in effect strengthens her inner self. The behavior of the woman also demonstrates the nonimitative dimension of her attending to Christ. Being essentially convinced of the need for the forgiveness of sins, she approaches Christ and disregards social convention by crashing in uninvited to a dinner at the Pharisee's house seeking forgiveness. She confesses her sins against all customary ways of doing so in the light among others, rather than in a private, dark place.

The nonimitative and non-comparing facets of imitation emphasize the positive valuation of a certain openness to inventiveness and creativity on the part of the imitator. The imitator is discouraged from faithful imitation and is expected to search for novel means in the existential mimesis. To conceptualize the openness of existential mimesis I engage Ricoeur's concept of refiguration, already discussed at length in Chapter 3. This notion belongs to his idea of the mimetic arc that is a threefold process of figuration that essentially describes human interactions with texts and the influence of texts on human existence. Being the final step of the mimetic arc (mimesis³), refiguration accounts for an individual engagement with text that denotes an interpretative effort of translating it into action.

The fertility of reading existential mimesis using the Ricoeurian apparatus is confirmed by William Schweiker in his reevaluation of Kierkegaard's appraisal of the human self as the *imago Dei*. Schweiker believes in the purchase of this religious conceptualization of human nature in the modern world despite the current skepticism toward any serious consideration of life that has religious underpinnings, but also despite the theoretical criticism of the mimetic self. "[T]he idea of an 'iconic self' and the talk about human nature, found in ancient and medieval faculty psychology, sustained much Western reflection on what it means to be human" (Schweiker 1990: 19). Yet the understanding of the "iconic self" must be reevaluated by accounting for the interdependency of human determinacy, freedom, and creativity. The Christian existence Kierkegaard presents in his authorship, requires an intimate engagement with the biblical texts before bringing the subjective experience of the text into "existential expression." Hence, this "iconic" reading of the self presupposes the view that the realization of the image of God in the human is not a matter of following set patterns that can yield particularly defined results. How the reader interprets a text depends on such "objective" factors as the kind and structure of the text in question, but also on such subjective factors as the reader's past experiences, taste, or character traits. "As a configuration of Christian existence, the text dips its roots in prefigured human existence, and calls for a concrete refiguration in life" (Schweiker 1990: 159).

The prefigured human existence Schweiker refers to is the first type of mimetic movement (mimesis¹) from Ricoeur's mimetic arc. It means the matrix of human experiences that have been textually expressed by

text, but that also shape what the text is. The technical term for text is narrative; its structure mirrors that of human life. Narrative has a plot which moves from the beginning toward some end, often culminating in denouement. In that sense, every text is a part of the matrix of all texts by virtue of its structure that captures human experiences. The refigurative reading of the imitation of Christ is open to a plurality of expressions of Christian existence. It indicates that a given expression of the following of Christ that takes on board the flexibility regarding the means of the expression is then part of all (possible) instances of Christian life.

Transposing that to the secular level, the refigurative element in existential mimesis makes sure that both individual and social lives are considered as being of importance. It allows for building a community that accommodates the proliferation of ways of being in the world. As Schweiker notes:

The point is that the refiguration of life is not completed merely at the level of our self-understanding as part of human world. The practical idea must be enacted in personal and social existence if it is to trans-form and refigure life.

(1990: 123)

Refigurative imitation in existential mimesis is then an alternative to the totalizing trends focusing on establishing a unified meta-narrative of human experience through mimicry, aping, comparison, social pressure. It considers the diversity of human experience as part of the human experience.

7.2.2 Toward an Indirect Prototype

Discussing the subject of the prototypes in Chapter 5, I indicated that in his writings Kierkegaard refers to a number of internal and external models of human existence. While the internal models present structures of genuine existence, the external models embody desirable traits of character, dispositions, or virtues such as courage, dealing with physical and mental suffering, and patience. With the exception of the pitiful prototype, Apostle Peter, whose appraisal is rather ambivalent in Kierkegaard, none of the external prototypes is actually a Christian. They teach us the foundations of genuine existence and generally understood faith and spirituality. Abraham is the father of faith, and Job is the model of existential integrity. As we have established, Christ is not a Christian either.

These and a number of other reflections about the nature of imitation in Chapter 4 should motivate us to engage anew with Kierkegaard's concern for the prototype of human existence appropriate to the nature of the Christian religion but also to the modern man. Indeed, the task of his authorship is to lay out again what it means to be a Christian in the

modern world. Some of these concerns are addressed in Kierkegaard's idea of an indirect prototype. While most of the aforementioned prototypes should be treated as indirect prototypes of Christian existence, I argue that its preeminent embodiment is in Kierkegaard's figure of "the lily and the bird" from the Gospels.

The fundamental facet of the indirect prototype is in their insistence on directing the attention of the follower away from them. The underpinnings of this approach are of a theological-religious nature. They are to be found in the economy of the Holy Trinity. In an 1852 journal entry, Kierkegaard explains the possibility of a relationship with God and the different stages that this relationship goes through by touching upon the complexity of Christ's prototypicality. The youthful trusting and enthusiastic belief in the possibility of having a relationship with God the Father is superseded by a maturing realization that God's supreme otherness requires the work of a mediator. "Then it is that God directs one to the Son, to the Mediator" (JP 2: 1432/SKS 25: 14, NB27: 23). This builds in the would-be Christian the confidence that while God the Father is infinitely different, Christ, who requires his followers to be like him, is somehow more reachable. Yet Christ is more than the prototype; he is the Atoner. Kierkegaard explains this point thus:

[Y]outhfulness actually is unaware of [this], for in his lovable eagerness the person is promptly on his way trying to be like the prototype, for he sees no problems whatsoever in respect to the prototype's infinite sublimity. Consequently this youthfulness lacks, for one thing, the category of the prototype's infinite sublimity (that he is, after all, qualitatively different from the merely human) and, for another, has an unrealistic idea about his own powers.

(JP 2: 1432/SKS 25: 141, NB27: 23)

Because Christ is both the prototype and the Atoner ("the 'Atoner' must not supplant the 'prototype'; the prototype remains with his demand that there be a striving to be like him"), just like the Father who directs attention away from Himself, "the prototype directs away from himself" to the Holy Spirit (JP 2: 1432/SKS 25: 141–142, NB27: 23). The trinitarian economy is based on "the law of inversion"; as God the Father leads to the Son, the Son to the Holy Spirit, it is also true that this direction is reversed and runs from the Holy Spirit, to the Son, to the Father. The two key takeaways here are that the relationship with God is possible only in an indirect way that focuses not on the particular figure in the Godhead, but on the relationship between them. Moreover, it is important to see that Christ's prototypicality is essentially expressed in Christ's redirection of attention from Him as the model for imitation because his "infinite sublimity" "prevents" him from being a direct prototype.

A further exposition of the indirect nature of the prototype we find in Kierkegaard's figure of "the lily and the bird" taken from the Gospels. While Kierkegaard offers a clearly religious interpretation of the prototypical dimension of the lily and the bird, I argue that their indirect nature offers resources that are critical for conceptualizing mimesis as indirect and intention-driven, but also nonimitative, non-comparing, and refigurative. These are the five facets of existential mimesis.

Kierkegaard's engagement with the lily and the bird comprises a considerable part of his signed writings. The theme of the lily and the bird appears as early as "The Expectancy of Eternal Salvation" (EUD: 258/SKS 5: 255) and it is the subject of Kierkegaard's deliberation in his last works, *Judge for Yourself* and *For Self-Examination*. In between these works, the theme appears in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, throughout *Christian Discourses*, and the theme is included in the title of one of Kierkegaard's crucial works from 1849, *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, from which I will start my consideration of the lily and the bird as an indirect model of genuine Christian existence.

The modern dimension of the consideration of the lily and the bird as the prototype is established in this work right from the outset. In an opening invocative prayer, Kierkegaard sets the tone for the whole work, arguing that the "lily and the bird" can teach us how to live a genuine life in the social context:

Father in heaven, what we in company with people, especially in a crowd of people, come to know with difficulty, and what we, if we have come to know it somewhere else, so easily forget in company with people, especially in a crowd of people—what it is to be a human being and what religiously is the requirement for being a human being—would that we might learn it or, if it is forgotten, that we might learn it again from the lily and the bird; would that we might learn it, if not all at once, then at least some of it, and little by little; would that from the lily and the bird we might this time learn silence, obedience, joy!

(WA: 3/SKS 11: 10)

This theme of the social dimension of human existence closes the whole work with Kierkegaard indicating that, by learning "the unconditional silence and the unconditional obedience with which the bird and the lily are unconditionally joyful over God," one can be "unconditionally just as joyful in solitude as in society" (WA: 44/SKS 11: 47). Uttering that, Kierkegaard responds to the Rousseauian supposition that "'Society,' society itself is the trouble" and that by removing oneself from it, one can solve the problem of human inauthenticity and ultimately be truly joyful (WA: 43/SKS 11: 47). Yet, human sociability is at fault here, but the problem it causes is in creating an environment where exploring important

existential questions is not encouraged, hence made essentially difficult to ask. “The lily and the bird” are presented by Kierkegaard as a model that mitigates this problem and can successfully speak to the modern subject. They do not represent an exemplar that provides us with an excellence that eventually discloses to us something hitherto unknown. More than teaching us something entirely new, their role is to remind the contemporary reader of that which has been forgotten in modernity. Indeed, Kierkegaard’s account of Christianity in this case, as in others, is a project of a grand, modern reminder. The modern subject needs to be reminded of the tenets of Christianity that have been forgotten or culturally appropriated and essentially lost.

The first of the three discourses—which is how Kierkegaard refers to his meditative reflections on biblical themes—comprising *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air* is subtitled “Look at the Birds of the Air; Look at the Lily in the Field.” In this deliberation we discover that the prototypical nature of the lily and the bird is pronounced by the Gospel that presents this model as “teachers” (WA: 10/SKS 11: 16). A corresponding interpretation of the lily and the bird appears later in *Judge for Yourself!* and *Christian Discourses*. In the second chapter of *Judge for Yourself!* entitled “Christ as the Prototype,” Kierkegaard points out that The New Testament essentially sees the lily and the bird as a “prototype and schoolmaster” that is not simply a normative “disciplinarian”:

You lily of the field, you bird of the air! How much we owe you! ... When the Gospel appointed you as prototype and schoolmaster, the Law was abrogated and jest was assigned its place in the kingdom of heaven; thus we are no longer under the strict disciplinarian but under the Gospel: “Consider the lilies of the field; look at the birds of the air!”

(JFY: 186/SKS 13: 233–234)

In “Introduction” to *Christian Discourses*, Kierkegaard presents the lily and the bird “as instructors” that are “there as a kind of assistant teachers” (CD: 9/SKS 10: 21). As we learn, the lily and the bird have the capacity to serve the function of instructors and assistant teachers—essentially assisting the Teacher—because they are neither pagans nor Christians; for that reason, they “are able to succeed in being helpful with the instructions in Christianity” (CD: 9/SKS 10: 21). What is their role then? “The lily and the bird” silently stand as a model to be imitated by the would-be Christian (EUD:156/SKS 5: 156). Kierkegaard says: “Pay attention to the lily and the bird; ... If you live as the lily and the bird live, then you are a Christian—which the lily and the bird neither are nor can become” (CD: 9/SKS 10: 21). One can become a Christian by living as the lily and the bird live.

The same prototypical function of the assistant teachers is discussed in *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, where the lily and the bird as “silent teachers” teach us how to be silent (WA: 10/SKS 11: 16), as “obedient teachers” teach obedience (WA: 24/SKS 11: 29), and as “joyful teachers of joy” teach us how to be joyful (WA: 36/SKS 11: 40). But how do the lily and the bird teach? Their teaching is an expression of what they are, and they can teach joy because they “themselves are joy and joy itself” (WA: 37/SKS 11: 41). However, considered as a teacher, the lily and the bird have a dialectical structure, as their teaching has an ontological and existential dimension. It is ultimately linked with their being, and indeed, their teaching redoubles it. The existential dimension of their teaching posits the choice that awaits each individual in acknowledging the lily and the bird as teachers and as their own teachers, which emphasizes the individual-subjective dimension of imitation. As Kierkegaard stresses, “You are to acknowledge the lily and the bird as your teachers and before God you are not to become more important to yourself than the lily and the bird” (WA: 17/SKS 11: 23).

Their mode of being the prototype of Christian existence is paradoxical. They fall under the problem of the one-to-one imitative relationship, already discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Indeed, as Pattison suggests, the lily and the bird do not represent the realm of the human, but of nature—the former is characterized by freedom, the essence of the latter is its outer form (1989: 385; 2013: 22–25). They must be then understood as indirect prototypes as their nature defies the one-to-one imitation between them and the would-be Christian. Their role is, as we learn, to point beyond themselves to the desirable qualities they represent.

As noted, the lily and the bird teach obedience by being obedient themselves. This is, however, a peculiar type of obedience, as it is pre-reflective and involuntary. Being part of the natural world, they do not possess spirit, soul, or consciousness. Their obedience is therefore something that is part of their nature from which they cannot deviate. Moreover, their willingness to do *x* seems to be at odds with the human endeavor to will the same that requires freedom.

Leaving aside the visibly puzzling logical incongruity of involuntary obedience, following Kierkegaard, the imitator is to imitate the single-mindedness of the lily and the bird and their obedience to God. This ideal of obedience and single-mindedness resembles Kierkegaard’s great anthropological, theological, psychological, but also sociological and ethical project of “willing one thing” that runs throughout his production. Because the composition of the lily and the bird is different from that of a human being, a direct imitation is not possible here. To imitate the lily and the bird is not to fall back on nature, but is to be spontaneous, as well as natural and simple in freedom, which is to come after reflection.

On the other hand, the imitator of the lily and the bird is to exercise obedience toward someone other than the lily and the bird. Interestingly,

Kierkegaard shows that after an individual learns what she is supposed to learn from the lily and the bird, the prototypical role of the lily and the bird becomes somehow diminished for the follower. Becoming unconditionally obedient, as the lily and the bird are, the individual learns to “serve only one master.” This means that by imitating the lily and the bird, one becomes a true Christian, that is, the one who recognizes Christ as her only master. What follows is that for such a person, the lily and the bird cease to exist as “the teacher” and become “icon.” This can be seen when Kierkegaard writes: “and if you have learned [unconditional obedience] thoroughly, you have become the more perfect one, so that the lily and the bird change from being the teacher to being the metaphor [*Billedet*]” (WA: 32/SKS 11: 36).

The volatility of the “metaphorical ontology” of the lily and the bird secures the authenticity and veracity of Christian existence; submission to the lily and the bird in the process of becoming a Christian is limited, and it ultimately surrenders the follower to Christ. Kierkegaard’s hermeneutic of the lily and the bird corresponds with his critical reading of Thomas à Kempis’s thought of submission to another human being from *The Imitation of Christ*. Although initially the Dane finds the thought compelling, finally, drawing upon the (unavoidable) institutionalization of religious movements, he rejects the medieval idea to be dependent upon a human pattern:

In Book 3, Chapter 23, where the Lord himself teaches one how he shall find peace. Thomas à Kempis says: “Be desirous, my son, to do the will of another rather than thine own.” This struck me. But the question is, where does one find clergymen such as these nowadays. If I were to submit myself to any clergyman, I am sure he would secularize my whole endeavor by promptly getting me into the establishment, into the moment, into an office, into a title, etc.

(JP3: 2691/SKS 22, 57, NB11, 101)

The peace à Kempis discusses can be found in silence, obedience, and joy, which the lily and the bird teach. To follow the lily and the bird is to follow Christ who, as we read, “pointed away from himself [and] helped us by not saying ‘Look at me’ but ‘Consider the lilies; Look at the birds!’” (JFY:187/SKS 16: 234). This reading of Christ’s focus on the lily and the bird corresponds with the relationship between the God-figures in the trinitarian Godhead discussed earlier on.

Kierkegaard’s rendering of the lily and the bird is a re-reading of the idea of religious development as abandoning one’s will and submitting to the will of another. This can be seen in Christ pointing away from himself to the lily and the bird—the prototype for Christian life—that eventually points back to Christ. This double movement, essentially qualifying genuine imitation in Kierkegaard, situates the lily and the bird as a prototype

for Christian life: “The bird and the lily shall be the teacher, that you shall imitate them [*tage efter dem*], learn from them in all earnestness” (WA: 17/SKS 11: 22). Earnestness is needed for the imitator to respect the indirect nature of the model at stake, but also, as I will explain next, the indirect nature of the required type of imitation appropriate to properly relate to this model.

7.2.3 *Indirect and Intention-Driven Mimesis*

Chapter 4, especially, has demonstrated the fundamental difficulty present in Kierkegaard’s conceptualization of the imitation of Christ in relation to his notion of the ideal of becoming a Christian. Asking “Can we imitate Christ?” which is typically followed by distinguishing what in Christ can or cannot, should or should not, be imitated, presupposes a direct type of imitation in both the question and the answer. Some scholars look for a sense of similarity between Christ and humans while identifying Christ’s human nature as the actual object of imitation. In that sense every human can imitate Christ’s deeds or traits of character because, it is assumed, they result from his human nature. Others point to the inseparability of the two natures in Christ to suggest a reading of Christ as the Pattern in a more general sense, for example, as a model of suffering.

These and other customary approaches to the imitation of Christ have been inconclusive and problematic, to say the least. Imitation cannot mean for Kierkegaard a desired degree of similarity. Similarity in this regard would be rendered by Kierkegaard as a kind of approximation, a Hegelian residue, that he rejects in *Postscript* for its unsuitability to reach truth. Similarity cannot be gauged, since one’s relationship to and with Christ is essentially governed by “the law of inversion” that stipulates that “to come closer is to get farther away” (JP 2: 1432/SKS 25: 142, NB27: 23). Lastly, rendering Christ and the lily and the bird as an indirect prototype is further evidence that Kierkegaard is after a new conceptualization of imitative relationship that is built on the idea of Christians’ outright dissimilarity from Christ. Christ is absolutely different from human beings, and that difference is, paradoxically, the negative Kierkegaard is looking for in the imitation of Christ.

I argue that Kierkegaard envisages a different dynamic that governs the relation between the imitator and its model(s). His conceptualization of mimesis is not about correspondence and similarity. Moreover, although tangible and concrete ethical acts are at stake in the imitation of Christ, it is indeed the performer’s intentions behind them that constitute the real object of imitation, not the acts themselves. Hence, Kierkegaard is interested in the kind of imitation that is oriented toward ends, not means. Kierkegaard has in mind a type of mimesis that is indirect in the sense that it is more concerned with the understanding of the purpose,

environment, and meaning of the imitated action or object, than merely with their faithful capturing and representing. I argue that paying close attention to his remarks on imitation allows us to reconstruct the indirect and intention-driven characteristics of imitation that constitute my concept of existential mimesis.

Further explicating Kierkegaard's indirect and intention-driven mimesis, I find it useful to refer to the discernment between imitation of means and intentions (goals and ends) in human behavior in empirical psychology. Proposing a theory of human cultural learning, Michael Tomasello, Ann C. Kruger, and Hilary H. Ratner (1993) indicate that imitative learning in humans is different from that of animals as it is based on the idea of an intentional agent performing the action to be imitated. Being part of social learning, imitative learning is a higher type of imitation that can contribute to cultural learning, which is ultimately at the foundation of human culture. While goal-directed imitation is found in nonhumans, it is usually imitated successfully in trial-and-error learning; in fact, some research shows that nonhuman animals have difficulty in learning novel skills, as they struggle to capture the goal behind action in imitation (Hurley and Chater 2005: 14–16). Contrasting humans and animals (including higher apes such as chimpanzees), Tomasello, Kruger, and Ratner maintain that

humans perceive others not as moving their limbs in particular ways, but as doing such things as opening a drawer, giving a gift to someone, washing the dishes, telling a story, throwing a ball—each of which may be done with many different body movements so long as the same goal in the external world is reached. Thus, when they attempt to reproduce the actions of others, humans—at least in some circumstances—reproduce the actions as they have understood them from the point of view of the intentionality involved, that is, the intended effect on the external world, including the social world.

(2005: 133)

While there is an implied gradation in the intensity and quality of imitation that complicates the distinction between various mimetic terms,³ it is safe to assume that the distinction between types of imitation appraised by Tomasello, Kruger, and Ratner is between a lower type of imitation concerned with the detailed representation of elements of perceived behavior, and a higher order of imitation of intentions. The former, direct type of imitation often misses the actual reason for the performed action, inhibits innovation, and restricts agency. The latter form is goal-oriented, hence open to interpretation and possible improvements. However, research conducted on imitation in humans demonstrates that, although we are capable of higher imitation, we engage imitation excessively, what is termed in the literature “over-imitation.” Over-imitation means the

imitation of elements of the imitated action that are irrelevant to the intention behind it. Some research in that regard suggests that the intensity of over-imitation grows with age; surprisingly, children over-imitate less than adults (Keupp, Behne, and Rakoczy 2018: 678–687; McGuigan, Makinson, and Whiten 2011: 1–18).

Existential mimesis in Kierkegaard is largely analogous to the imitation of intentions. Hence, indirect and intention-driven existential mimesis is not about copying the means, or even the results in some cases; rather, it is about grasping the intentions behind the imitated objects or actions, and representing them through (often) completely different means. The real object of imitation in the imitation of Christ is then the intention that motivates his actions. The link between intention and the indirect nature of imitation at stake is clearly stated by Anti-Climacus in *Practice in Christianity*. Therein, the author ascribes a strong role of intentions to Christ's actions. Moreover, he also points out to a largely indirect nature of Christ's prototypicality and the indirect kind of imitation that his prototypicality engenders. As an indirect prototype, Christ is presented as someone who is “in one sense *behind* people, propelling forward, while in another sense he stands *ahead*, beckoning”; to imitate Christ, one needs to follow into his footsteps (PC: 238/SKS12: 232).

Christ came to the world with the intention [*Hensigt*] of saving the world, also with the intention [*Hensigt*—this in turn is implicit in this first purpose [*Hensigt*—of being *the prototype* [*Forbilledet*], of leaving footprints [*Fodspor*] for the person who wanted to join him, who then might become an imitator [*Efterfølger*], this indeed corresponds to “footprints [*Fodspor*].”

(PC: 238/SKS12: 231–232; *translation modified*)

To further illustrate the dynamic of intention-oriented and indirect elements of existential mimesis, I take obedience as an important object of imitation in Kierkegaard. If obedience is that which needs to be imitated by a genuine Christian, we should consider the fact that Christ's obedience to the Father and the lily's obedience toward its creator are achieved *via* different means (they can also be understood as different objects, such as different types of obedience). Our learning of obedience from the lily and the bird, but also from Christ, must not be focused on the means used to express their obedience. The lily and the bird are “naturally” obedient toward Christ, but in their obedience, they do not exercise freedom. Christian obedience must be expressed through our will, which forces our expression of obedience to be different from that of the lily and the bird, who by nature are devoid of freedom. The same rule of dissimilarity applies to Christ who is a God-man, and who is not a Christian.

Difference in the expression of obedience is also attributed to Christians. Analyzing the case of the defrocked Bishop Adler's “divine

call,” Kierkegaard points out that obedience can be expressed by both silence and preaching. Whether one must speak to their contemporaries prompted by the divine call or remain taciturn depends on “a superior capacity for reflection at his disposal” and the understanding “that the ethical accompaniment to this call and this possession of a revelation is an enormous responsibility” (JP 1: 234/Pap. VIII2 B 13: 61–63). Here, the “extraordinary” individual who was bestowed with direct revelation cannot follow a cut-and-dried rule; while he cannot do as he pleases, he must subjectively respond to it with the right means. Otherwise, as we learn, obedience can be in fact disobedience. Moreover, while some may preach obedience to others by means of words, hence engaging what Kierkegaard calls an indirect mode of communication, others may communicate directly by ultimate means of voluntary suffering and martyrdom (JP 2: 2004/SKS 20: 280–281; JP 3: 2647/Pap. IX B 63).

The same rules of indirectness and focus on the intention and goal behind the imitated model is present in Kierkegaard’s reformulation of the imitation of Christ. Indeed, Christ is not in sight for the follower, hence the imitation occurs in the absence of the one followed. Following in Christ’s footsteps does not entail that they are in plain sight or easily identifiable. We see that characterization of the mode of imitation at stake in the imitation of Christ in Kierkegaard’s “The Gospel of Suffering.” This indirect character of imitation is clearly contained in Kierkegaard’s allegorical presentation of faith as a pilgrimage. He reinforces the metaphor of pilgrimage by calling Christ’s followers strangers and pilgrims. Answering the guiding thought of the text, “What Meaning and What Joy There Are in the Thought of Following Christ [*følge Christum efter*],” Kierkegaard points out that Christ himself “once walked the earth and left footprints that we should follow [*følge*]” (UDVS: 217/SKS 8: 319; cf. PC: 238/SKS 12: 231). What it means to imitate Him is not clearly defined; we are left with an allegorical image of a track on the ground. A path, a track, or a pattern cannot be directly followed or imitated for the very reason of what it is. It is not a prescription (or suggestion); it is only “guidance” (UDVS: 217/SKS 8: 319).

Existential mimesis cannot be a direct type of imitation as it takes place in the absence of the one followed, although it starts with a vision of the prototype. Analogously, the Disciples of Christ only started to follow Him after His death. To follow Christ is, for Kierkegaard, “to walk by oneself and to walk alone” (UDVS: 220/SKS 8: 322). He says:

To follow, then, means to walk by oneself and to walk alone along the road that the teacher walked—to have no visible person with whom one can take counsel, to have to choose by oneself, to scream in vain as the child screams in vain since the mother does not dare to be of visible help, to despair in vain since no one can help and heaven does not dare to be of visible help. But to be helped invisibly means

to learn to walk by oneself, because it means to learn to conform one's mind to the mind of the teacher, who is, however, invisible.

(UDVS: 220/SKS 8: 322)

In walking alone, one is deprived of the direct resource of the visible model. Yet, this deprivation grants the follower the ability "to learn to conform one's mind to the mind of the teacher." In walking alone, one is able to grasp not that which is visible, such are the contingent means of the imitated action performed by a model, but the essential of the intention and goal guiding the actions of the imitated model.

7.3 Authenticity

I have presented existential mimesis as a remedy to the maladies plaguing the modern subject that are produced by the negative effects of mimesis on human individual and social life. Being nonimitative, non-comparing, refigurative, and indirect and intention-driven/goal-oriented, existential mimesis provides the modern subject with positive conceptual tools and strategies to minimize, if not prevent, the negative influences of mimetic affects on the integrity and well-being of the self. Existential mimesis, then, works to make the human being authentic.

Kierkegaard is unsurprisingly a champion of intellectual discourse of authenticity. The ideal of authenticity in Kierkegaard has been extensively analyzed. He has a complex view of authenticity. It comprises the well-being of an individual on such levels as the spiritual, psychological, moral, and social. It seeks to eradicate the pathologies of human behavior, character, dispositions. It engages the categories of integrity and sincerity to conceptualize the relation between human freedom and necessity essential to the structure of the human self.

Mimesis poses a serious threat to the ideal of authenticity. Two important problems that stem from this pertain to: (a) the consideration of the role of freedom in human authenticity; and (b) the moral-ontological dimension of selfhood. The former problem we see in Kierkegaard's consideration of the role of habit; the latter we see in his conceptualization of the ideal of primitivity.

7.3.1 *Habit*

Kierkegaard has a radically anti-Humean view of habit. Habit makes us inauthentic because it decreases the passionate part of our nature and curtails our freedom by impinging on the spontaneity of our reactions. Kierkegaard is especially uneasy about the unobservability of the formation of habitual predispositions in humans coupled with habit's unmatched ability to alter our nature (dispositions, character, values, etc.). It is especially difficult to observe habituation from the perspective

of the person afflicted by it. The malevolent makeup of habit pertains to its robust capacity to change something positive into something negative by sheer force of mindless repetition, by what Kierkegaard calls “the habitual routine of sameness” (CD: 254/SKS 10: 268). Habit infects love with inauthenticity by altering its nature and effectively terminating it.

“The Esthetic Validity of Marriage” from *Either/Or 2* presents a radically negative appraisal of habit. Its author protests against a positive valuation of habit in human life, especially with respect to love; he defines habit in mimetic terms as “a stubborn repetition.” Because it removes from our actions the element of conscious decision making, habit negatively affects our responsibility and freedom:

“Habit” is properly used only of evil, in such a way that by it one designates either a continuance in something that in itself is evil or such a stubborn repetition of something in itself innocent that it becomes somewhat evil because of this repetition. Thus habit always designates something unfree.

(EO2: 127/SKS 3: 127)

This theme of the negative effect of habit on the authenticity of human life is treated systematically in *Works of Love*, where Kierkegaard defines the problem with habit from the internal perspective of someone affected by it. Therein, he also offers a strategy to defend oneself from habit. Kierkegaard says: “Habit is not like other enemies that one sees and against which one aggressively defends oneself; the struggle is actually with oneself in getting to see it” (WL: 36/SKS 9: 43). Habit is “a predatory creature” that preys on those who are “asleep”; those who are “awake” have means to resist it, which for Kierkegaard largely consist in the knowledge of how habit operates but also in acting to actively prevent it by preparing oneself against habit.

One way of guarding oneself against habit entails requesting other human beings, a friend or a family member, to constantly remind us about the threat of habit. The other strategy would be focused on making a conscious effort to be alerted to change, which would produce in us a kind of painful feeling of being baffled or thrown off one’s scent. These techniques are not bulletproof, though. The only permanent solution is in the unchanging of the eternal, which Kierkegaard mysteriously defines as “that which has undergone the change of eternity by becoming duty” (WL: 37/SKS 9: 44).

The change effected by habit on love does not come in a spectacular manner but emerges gradually, slowly shifting emphasis on various points of importance in our apprehension of love and shuffling about minor elements that compose it. By helping to build schemes that offset or minimize efforts needed to sustain love, habit changes the essential element of love that is commitment and duty to constantly rekindle it.

Especially in marriage, love can transform itself into a state that brings little to no excitement to life due to love's continuance and the lasting commitment to the beloved. No wonder, the aesthete, whom the author of "The Esthetic Validity of Marriage" addresses in his letters, cannot imagine marital love to be exciting and spontaneous throughout. What the ethical author recognizes in the constancy of marriage as "the melody ... of the domestic life of marriage," the aesthete perceives through the lens of habit as "its uniformity, its complete lack of events, its continuance in emptiness, which is death or worse than death" (EO2: 143–144/SKS 3: 142).

In contrast to Aristotle, who sees a positive role for habit in the cultivation of moral emotions and virtues, Kierkegaard is critical of the impact of habituation on these phenomena. Written by the pseudonymous author Inter et Inter, *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* makes a case for the negative influence of habit on admiration. This short book presents the life of a Danish actress, Thomasine Gyllembourg-Ehrensward, whom Kierkegaard praises for a life marked by artistic integrity, wherein she resisted the pressure to adapt her craft to the demands of the fickle public. The praiseworthy quality of her artistic life informs the ideal of an authentic life for Kierkegaard. And it dramatically contrasts with the fluctuation of taste in the public, that he appraises disparagingly. As indicated in Chapters 2 and 6, the problems with admiration in relation to the actress pertain to the fact that change in the public admiration of the actress is incongruous with her "unchanging" dedication to a life of meaning and the fact that the admiration for her, being affective and of a cyclical nature, is in fact unable to account for the value that her life expresses.

In particular, the negative link between habit and emotions adds to Kierkegaard's criticism of the collective formation and expression of admiration. Reflecting on the dampening of public admiration across time, Inter et Inter observes that there is something inauthentic in the origination of public admiration toward the actress, which he terms "the incessant overflowing of this banal recognition" (CD: 314/SKS 14: 101). The author is quick to indicate that the actress is deserving of admiration that is genuine. To be such, admiration cannot be expressed collectively because collective expression constitutes and enhances the process of cancelling the value recognized as deserving merit. This cancellation happens through habit which, as we have noted, has the potential to change something genuine into something inauthentic.

Oh, how rarely is there a person, to say nothing of a generation, that does not indulge in the fraud of habit, so that even if the expression is not changed, yet this unchanged expression becomes something else through habit, so that now this verbatim sameness nevertheless sounds very weak, very mechanical, very flat, although the same thing is said.

Of all sophists, time is the most dangerous, and of all dangerous sophists, habit is the most cunning. It is already difficult enough to realize that one changes little by little over the years, but the fraud of habit is that one is the same, unchanged, that one says the same thing, unchanged, and yet is very changed and yet says it, very changed.

(CD: 314–315/SKS 14: 101)

The gradual change that is effected in the individual by the force of habit may not be easily detected to the one considered. This inconspicuous character of change is augmented by the human propensity to self-deception (“those who are self-deceived through habit, so that they seem unchanged but yet are as if emaciated in their inner beings”; CD: 315/SKS 14: 101), which also results from habit. An individual may indeed deceive himself into thinking that he is the same today as he was in the past.

As established in Chapter 2, Kierkegaard is not opposed to the importance of change in the individual human being; his concept of repetition is not about a recurrence of the same. He takes seriously the temporal and *repeatable* aspects of human existence, rethinking the value of the everyday human experience of living in the world. Rather, the previously quoted passages refer critically to a view that what is repeated in habitual repetition may appear as the repetition of sameness, or if it is the case, it may appear that the repetition of sameness has no negative effect on one’s selfhood, by which Kierkegaard understands a commitment to core values and beliefs.

The interplay of “verbatim sameness” and “one changes little by little over the years” requires us to rethink how we can authentically repeat with a difference. Indeed, as it is presented in a short interjecting parable of a king visiting a humble family, the daily repetition of the visit would lose its meaning for the king and his subjects. The constant visitation would change the significance of the king’s inspection into a dull monotony expressed in the meaningless habitual “We thank you for the great honor” (CD: 315/SKS 14: 101). We should not rely on habit to achieve noble goals as habit rids our actions of meaning and intention that must be, as we find in this category of existential repetition, continuously and consciously reinitiated and brought into existence.

7.3.2 *Primitivity*

Kierkegaard considers primitivity as something good, because it represents a positive quality of immediacy, simplicity, and purity. All three of these are desirable characteristics of authentic existence. Kierkegaard contrasts primitivity with imitation, predominantly iterated as “aping” [*Efterbelse*], which he recognizes as a powerfully collective and contagious phenomenon that negatively influences people’s lives and makes

them inauthentic. This consideration of the link between primitivity and imitation is underpinned by Kierkegaard's appraisal of the subject with regard to specifically Christian existence, but also in relation to human nature in general. It presents primitivity as the core of the human individual ideal self and the foundation of human identity.

Most of Kierkegaard's references to primitivity appear in his journals (Valcourt-Blouin 2016: 135–140). Scattered throughout, they are often presented in a non-systematic and anecdotal way as marginalia. An entry from 1854, which makes an important conceptual link between the ideal of human authentic existence and primitivity, defines how we must understand primitivity. The property of primitivity should qualify how humans engage intellectually and existentially with the world of ideas: “only the human existing which relates itself to the concepts by primitively taking possession of them, by examining, by modifying, by producing new, only this existing interests existence” (JP 1: 1067/SKS 26: 236). This engagement is radically active; it is about neither a merely passive reception of concepts nor an active pursuit that ends with reaching the ideal *via* even the closest of approximations. Primitivity in thinking and existing is about changing the old and creating the new. This is a surprising remark for Kierkegaard, who opens this entry with reference to Plato, who is unmistakably dedicated to the radical opposition between the original and the copy, a dyadic that is, at least in the customary reading of Plato, not open to “modifying” and “producing new.” Moreover, this creative approach to ideas embedded in the idea of primitivity is contrasted with the plethora of non-primitive life projects that Kierkegaard pejoratively sums up as being a “merely mimicker-existence [*Exemplar-Existentis*], a rummaging in the finite world, which vanishes without a trace and has never interested existence” characteristic of “a philistine-bourgeois's existing” (JP 1: 1067/SKS 26: 236). The radically imitative dimension of the non-primitive life is expressed in the Hongs' mimetically charged translation of *Exemplar-Existentis*. This Danish compound word means an instance, a specimen, or an example of existence; the Hongs' rendering as “mimicker-existence” suggests a life that is indiscernible from other lives, and one that has compromised its primary individuality, hence its primitivity.

This secular iteration of primitivity formulated in this fairly late entry sheds an interpretative light on many instances where primitivity is presented in relation to the ideals of Christian existence or religious life. That is to say, primitivity in Kierkegaard is not merely a religious category. Some journal entries confirm this reading by dialoging with categories that have dialectical, ethical-religious denotations. These categories include spirit, the individual, inwardness, etc. One example of this we find in a journal entry with the telling title “Primitivity,” which discloses the interplay of the two dimensions of primitivity: universal and individual. It locates primitivity at the core of Kierkegaard's anthropology.

He says: “Every human being is by nature intended for primitivity, since primitivity is the possibility of ‘spirit’—God, who has done it, knows this best” (JP1: 84/SKS 26: 40, NB31: 55). There is an interplay between the religious and the secular embedded in Kierkegaard’s notion of primitivity. His defining of spirit as primitivity corresponds with his definition of spirit as being tantamount to not being like others. This is also evident in the link between “a murdering of one’s primitivity” that is found in secular thinking and the emaciation of the self from *The Crisis*, wherein the religious and the secular are intertwined.

A close reading of the two journal entries from 1851 and 1854 titled “The Primitive—the Traditional” (JP1: 214/SKS 24: 444–445, NB25: 11) and “Socratic Ignorance” (JP 4: 4296/SKS 25: 272, NB 28: 70) further demonstrates the intertwining of the Christian and the social-political elements embedded in the notion of primitivity. These journal entries present the nonreligious and largely mimetic underpinnings of Kierkegaard’s emphasis on primitivity in the Christian context by pointing to three things: (a) a thematic opposition between inwardness, individuality, and uncertainty, and outwardness, crowd behavior, and proofs; (b) the concept of imitation; and (c) the notion of “being alone with” God-the-idea.

In the earlier entry, Kierkegaard traces the hypocrisy and lack of faith of “the Orthodox” to the imitation of the emerging trends of textual criticism, beliefs in scientific and historical proofs, rather than having a faith in God. He does not see this as a methodological problem of distinct categories *à la* Aristotle (faith-reason), or simply as a lack of faith as such, but rather as caused by the human inclination to crowd behavior and imitation. For Kierkegaard, it is hypocrisy to have faith and rely on historical proofs at the same time. One who maintains the quality of primitivity recognizes this claim as an obligation that has an inward and individual, not collective, dimension; Kierkegaard says that “without having others up front whom one mimics [*efteraber*] and appeals to,” one is able to be “alone with God” (JP 1: 214/SKS 24: 445, NB25: 11). The 1854 journal entry makes very similar points. Therein, Kierkegaard states that primitivity and inwardness mean “be[ing] alone with the idea,” in contrast to “all the rubbish of historical knowledge ... and the others” and “aping [*Efterabelse*] of what it means to be a man, and aping [*Efterabelse*] of ‘the others,’ the historical” (JP 4: 4296/SKS 25: 272, NB 28: 70).

In short, in both journal entries, Kierkegaard’s diagnosis of compromised Christianity leads him to the conclusion that human individuality-primitivity can be jeopardized by the natural human propensity to a particular type of negative imitation, aping. This particular conceptualization of imitation, as has been already argued, refers to an undesirable type of imitation characterized by an imitator who does not focus on the intended idea in imitation and does not use the faculty

of discernment when reproducing the given action or object; instead, one simply copies an action indiscriminately.

As established in the previous chapter, Kierkegaard is critical of the collective, affective, and unconscious side of that type of imitation when he discusses primitivity in contrast to aping, which should not be understood as a positively appraised intellectual capacity. In fact, in another journal entry from 1854, he describes humans as naturally having great imitative skills and strong imitative drives. He points to tremendous human skills in imitative malleability, social adaptivity, and group formation. Kierkegaard also indicates that imitation is effortless and pleasurable to people. These features of human imitation are contrasted with primitivity that is laborious and does not bring pleasure:

Men are perfectible. They can be influenced to do one thing just as well as another, to fast as well as to live in worldly enjoyment—the most important thing is that they are just like the others, that they ape [*Efterabelse*] each other, do not stand alone.

But God wants ... *primitivity*. Yet this is the effort we shrink from most of all, whereas we relish everything called aping [*Efterabelse*].

From this it is apparent what little good it does to bring an objectively greater truth to bear—and then to allow aping [*Efterabelse*].

But both teachers and followers feel best in aping [*Efterabelse*] and by aping [*Efterabelsen*]*—therefore they are lovingly unanimous about it and call it love.*

(JP3: 3560/SKS 25: 305, NB 29: 13)

Human imitation understood as aping, on the one hand, produces “spiritlessness” in the sphere of religion, and, on the other hand, contributes to a type of negative sociality that Kierkegaard elsewhere calls “leveling.” While Kierkegaard does not fully develop or outline a positive vision of the social-ethical as such (at least in contrast to Schleiermacher and Tarde, as discussed in Chapter 6), he does emphasize that—in a broader social context—a human being will always struggle to keep in tension her individuality and her universality. To be a single individual means to embrace the two types of ideality, individual and universal, as opposed to choosing just one of the two. In that respect, Kierkegaard guards us against respectively “simply and solely aping [*efterabe*] ‘the others[.]’” sense of individuality (JP 1: 649/SKS 29: 390, Papir 365: 4) or becoming “homogeneous with [one’s] world of time present, assimilated, as we say of the digestive process, the age has eaten him” (JP 2: 2062/SKS 25: 489, NB30: 132).

By capturing these two dimensions in tension, primitivity secures the individuality of a particular human being against the backdrop of her belonging to the species. That tension between heterogeneity and homogeneity in the human often results in the oppressive victory of the latter:

“The tyrannizing, leveling world of time present is always trying to change everything into homogeneity so that all [human beings] become mere numbers, specimens [*Exemplarer*]” (JP 2: 2061/SKS 25: 489, NB30: 132). Correspondingly, Kierkegaard criticizes his own times in *Two Ages*, indicating that society has developed a capacity to create a paradoxical universal-individual, a social entity that can be abstracted from many individuals. He says: “The trend today is in the direction of mathematical equality, so that in all classes about so and so many uniformly make one individual” (TA: 85/SKS 8: 81). Following that line of thought, I read Kierkegaard as critically observing that although some people think that we can create an ideal merchant, citizen, or parent by assembling constructs based on some socially desirable characteristics, this same strategy is not analogous to an ideal human being, let alone an ideal Christian.

Notes

- 1 See for example Hegel’s complex understanding of difference rendered into three related notions, namely, “absolute difference” [*der absolute Unterschied*], “diversity” [*Verschiedenheit*], and “opposition” [*Gegensatz*] in Stewart (2015: 241–244).
- 2 The Hongs translated *Forstanden* as “the understanding.”
- 3 It is difficult to ultimately settle differences between various types of imitation in social and natural sciences. Scholars use different terms such as imitation, emulation, mimicry, copying, and so forth. Donald (2005) distinguishes between mimicry, imitation, and mimesis. Mimicry is directed to the means of reduplicated action; imitation is concerned with the ends and purpose of the imitated action. Mimesis builds upon the other two and engages the reflective faculty of the performer (“it is reflective and potentially self-supervisory,” Donald 2005: 288), and takes the audience into account.

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Conclusion

This book is a meeting point of two academic worlds: Kierkegaard research and studies of mimesis. Heretofore, these two worlds have operated largely independently, hardly crossing each other's paths. Just as Kierkegaard is not perceived as an important theoretician or critic of mimesis, so Kierkegaardians do not seem to find mimesis to be of much importance to Kierkegaard's thought and authorship. My hope in this book was to change this perception for the mutual benefit of both groups of researchers. Therein, I have established that Kierkegaard is well-read in the classical and modern literature on mimesis. I have also argued that he actively participated in the mimesis discourse of his own epoch. His contribution to the mimesis debate anticipates contemporary research on mimesis in disciplines ranging from philosophy to sociology and cultural studies, but is also strikingly aligned with some conceptualizations of mimesis in the natural sciences.

I present Kierkegaard as an important thinker in the genealogical thinking about mimesis, among such thinkers as Nietzsche, Freud, Le Bon, Tarde, Girard, Lacoue-Labarthe, Derrida, Ricoeur, and others. A genealogical approach to mimesis seeks to understand its meanings in relation to its various iterations in the concept's intellectual history. Kierkegaard never attempts to pinpoint mimesis; his employment of mimesis shows his knowledge or intuition about the complexity of this notion and the inherent difficulty in defining it. His productive engagement of mimesis in his works discloses the richness of this concept.

Indeed, this book demonstrates the critical role of mimesis in Kierkegaard's thought and authorship. Throughout it, I have engaged a large body of his pseudonymous and signed works, steadily, unveiling the numerous levels on which mimesis is operative in Kierkegaard's writings. I have shown mimesis at work on the conceptual level, but also on the level of the structuring of Kierkegaard's authorship, which determines the *how* of his communication with the readership. Mimesis in Kierkegaard pertains to such openly mimetic concepts as representation, imitation, resemblance, but also to notions of which the mimetic breadth

has been often ignored in the scholarship, such as repetition, redoubling, reduplication, and comparison.

This book presents Kierkegaard as contributing to the modern shift in appraising mimesis from artistic representation based on the ideals of similarity to mimesis as a human condition underpinning the individual and social aspects of human existence. The seven chapters of this book account for a development in Kierkegaard's conceptualization of mimesis from its classical rendering as representation to the view of mimesis as embodied, while the predominantly pro-modern appraisal of mimesis takes as its subject an individual isolated from its environment. The latter view sees an individual as part of the social which she shapes, and which, in turn, shapes her.

Starting with Chapter 1, where I discussed Kierkegaard's engagement with a fundamental facet of mimesis, representation, the notions of originality and genius in artistic production and intellectual discourse, I gradually moved in the following chapters to account for Kierkegaard's interest in and observations on the role of mimesis in human existence. Thus, Chapter 2 grappled with Kierkegaard's original remarks on the human experience of living a temporal life and the subject of meaning in life in the world of repetition. Chapter 3 delved into the imitative structure of the human self by arguing that Kierkegaard's fictitious and non-fictitious autobiographical remarks form the environment in which the self mimetically creates and nourishes itself. Chapter 4, which comprised the central part of this book, opened with a critical overview of the literature on imitation in Kierkegaard, pointing toward the need for a systematic exposition and analysis of several terms used by Kierkegaard to denote imitation in his works. These terms, the analysis of which points toward a conceptual evolution in Kierkegaard's thinking about imitation, show the vastness of his creative but also critical approach to the conceptualization of a positive notion of imitation. Together with Chapter 5, which offered a reading of Kierkegaard's prototypes of existence along the notions of *exemplum* and *figura*, these two chapters brought to light the inherent difficulty with regards to the lack of a suitable rendering of the concept of imitation that would guarantee a genuine relationship with mimetic models. Chapter 6 shed an important light on Kierkegaard's remarks on human affectivity and collective crowd behaviors that undermine human individuality and hamper the sincerest efforts made to create and foster communal life. In Chapter 7, I engaged some resources on mimesis derived from Kierkegaard's works to propose a positive conceptualization of mimesis that responds to the affective mimesis that makes us inauthentic and engenders violence. Dubbing it existential mimesis, I argued for a concept of mimesis that is nonimitative, non-comparing, and refigurative, but also indirect and intention-driven. Existential mimesis offers a positive manner of shaping the relation between an imitator and the

imitated exemplar by upholding the value of human primitivity central to Kierkegaard's authentic, hence, non-habitual existence.

In my move of turning to mimesis in this book, I also re-turn to it. In this sense, my book re-turns to one of the most important philosophical observations about humans, which deems us to be fundamentally imitative. Kierkegaard, I have argued, takes this fact very seriously, incorporating it into his religious and philosophical writings. But his view is less naïve than that of the classical thinkers who either think about an individual as divorced from social influences or as able to control or censor mimesis. The contemporary studies of the human brain and human behavior, human learning, AI, and the financial markets have recently turned to mimesis in their research, attempting to understand the influence of imitation in humans on their respective investigations. One such example is the famous discovery of mirror neurons in human primates that largely demonstrates the primacy of mimesis on the neuro level of firing synapses in human action.

My book demonstrates the role of mimesis in such important themes from Kierkegaard as the single individual, the ideal self, authenticity; it also challenges the customary way of reading Kierkegaard's engagement with imitation. The disclosed heterodoxy of his employment of the imitation of Christ and his appraisal of the prototypical role of Christ should confound thinkers researching theological or religious tropes in Kierkegaard. My contention in this book is that Kierkegaard's remarks on imitation formulated in relation to the imitation of Christ can be translated to the secular audience. Without a deeper understanding of imitation as being part of mimesis, we may overlook Kierkegaard's tipoff from the Lily Discourses and *Armed Neutrality* stipulating that Christ is not a Christian. Such realization motivated me to seek out a *different* conceptualization of imitation in his work that I find in existential mimesis. Although built on religious foundations, existential mimesis can be used in secular contexts of social and political philosophy, but also in moral psychology and education.

I do not claim in this book to either depict all instances of mimesis in Kierkegaard's thought or identify every area in his writings that requires mimesis as an interpretative lens. One such area that necessitates further exploration in the context of mimesis is that of ethics. If we take seriously Kierkegaard's observation of the influence of the affective dimension of mimesis on our being and doing in the world, as I believe Kierkegaard does, one must inquire further about its role in the creation and learning of morality. One should ask how it is that humans learn how to be ethical and what it means to be good if our affectivity often takes precedence over the most rigorous argumentation. This means thinking about human existence taking the human subject as one truly is.

Nobody was more alert to the perils of forgetting the nature of the thing doing the knowing than Kierkegaard. His recognition that we are

ourselves mimetic is central to his thought. “The being whose analysis our task is, is always we ourselves ... The whatness of this being must be understood in terms of its being insofar as one can speak of it at all” (Heidegger 1996: 39). This remark by Heidegger from his *Being and Time* truly reflects the spirit of Kierkegaard’s existential project that considers the being of a human being to be essentially related to mimesis.

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