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# The Naked Self

Kierkegaard and Personal Identity



Patrick Stokes

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*For Ruby and Lily, who both came along while I was writing this.*



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- Some of Chapter 6 appeared as ‘Anti-Climacus and Neo-Lockeanism: Towards a Kierkegaardian Theory of Personal Identity’. In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2009*, edited by Niels-Jørgen Cappelørn and K. Brian Söderquist, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009, 527–55.
- Material from ‘Naked Subjectivity: Minimal vs. Narrative Selves in Kierkegaard’. *Inquiry* 53:4 (2010): 356–82 appears in Chapters 7 and 8.

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# Abbreviations for Kierkegaard's Works

References to Kierkegaard's writings are given in the text in brackets, with the English version cited first followed by the Danish version, as well as a journal/notebook reference where appropriate (e.g. DD, NB5 etc.)

## *English Translations:*

The following abbreviations are used for the *Kierkegaard's Writings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) series:

- BA        *The Book on Adler*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1995.
- CA        *The Concept of Anxiety*, translated by Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson, 1980.
- CD        *Christian Discourses* and *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1997.
- CUP, 1    *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments'* Volume One, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1992.
- EO, 1     *Either/Or* Volume One, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1987.
- EO, 2     *Either/Or* Volume Two, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1995.
- EPW      *Early Polemical Writings*, edited and translated by Julia Watkin, 1990.
- EUD      *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1990.
- FSE      *For Self-Examination* and *Judge For Yourself!* translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1990.
- FT        *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1983.
- JC        *Johannes Climacus or De omnibus dubitandum est*. See PF.
- LD        *Letters and Documents*, translated by Henrik Rosenmeier, 1978.
- PC        *Practice in Christianity*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1991.
- PF        *Philosophical Fragments* and *Johannes Climacus*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1985.
- SLW      *Stages on Life's Way*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1988.

- SUD     *The Sickness Unto Death*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1980.
- TA       *Two Ages*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1978.
- TDIO    *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1993.
- TM       *The Moment and Late Writings*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1998.
- UDVS    *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1993.
- WL       *Works of Love*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1995.

*Journal Translations:*

- KJN 1    *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks: Vol. 1, Journals AA–DD*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- KJN 2    *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks: Vol. 2, Journals EE–KK*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, Vanessa Rumble, K. Brian Söderquist, and volume editor George Pattison, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- KJN 4    *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks: Vol. 4: Journals NB:NB5*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Joel D. S. Rasmussen, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011.
- JP       *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 7 volumes, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk, Bloomington, IN and London: Indiana University Press, 1967–78. (Citations give entry number rather than page number).

*Danish Texts:*

The following abbreviations are used for the *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (Copenhagen: Gads) series:

- SKS 1    *Af en endnu Levendes Papirer; Om Begrebet Ironi*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, and Finn Hauberg Mortensen, 1997.
- SKS 2    *Enten-Eller, Første del*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup and Finn Hauberg Mortensen, 1997.
- SKS 3    *Enten-Eller, Anden del*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, and Finn Hauberg Mortensen, 1997.

- SKS 4 *Gjentagelsen; Frygt og Bæven; Philosophiske Smuler; Begrebet Angest; Forord*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, and Finn Hauberg Mortensen, 1997.
- SKS K4 *Kommentar til Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter Bind 4*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, and Finn Hauberg Mortensen, 1997.
- SKS 5 *Opbyggelige taler, 1843-44; Tre Taler ved tænkte Leiligheder*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, Johnny Kondrup, and Finn Hauberg Mortensen, 1998.
- SKS 6 *Stadier paa Livets Vei*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, Johnny Kondrup, and Finn Hauberg Mortensen, 1999.
- SKS 7 *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, and Johnny Kondrup, 2002.
- SKS 8 *En literair Anmeldelse; Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, and Johnny Kondrup, 2004.
- SKS 9 *Kjærlighedens Gjerninger*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, and Johnny Kondrup, 2004.
- SKS 10 *Christlige Taler*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, and Johnny Kondrup, 2004.
- SKS 11 *Lilien paa Marken og Fuglen under Himlen; Tvende ethisk religiøse Smaa Afhandlinger; Sygdommen til Døden; 'Ypperstepræsten'—'Tolderen'—'Synderinden'*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Anne Mette Hansen, and Johnny Kondrup, 2006.
- SKS 12 *Indøvelse i Christendom; En opbyggelig Tale; To Taler ved Altergangen om Fredagen*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Anne Mette Hansen, and Johnny Kondrup, 2008.
- SKS 13 *Dagbladsartikler 1834-48; Om min Forfatter-Virksomhed; Til Selvprøvelse*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, Tonny Aagaard Olesen, and Steen Tullberg, 2009.
- SKS 15 *Sendebrev til Heiberg; Johannes Climacus; Bogen om Adler*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, Tonny Aagaard Olesen, and Steen Tullberg, 2012.
- SKS 17 *Journalerne AA, BB, CC og DD*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, and Johnny Kondrup, 2000.
- SKS 18 *Journalerne EE, FF, GG, HH, JJ og KK*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, and Johnny Kondrup, 2001.
- SKS 19 *Notesbøgerne 1-15*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, and Johnny Kondrup, 2001.



- SKS 20 *Journalerne NB–NB5*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, and Johnny Kondrup, 2003.
- SKS 22 *Journalerne NB11–NB14*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, and Johnny Kondrup, 2005.
- SKS 24 *Journalerne NB21–NB25*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Anne Mette Hansen, and Johnny Kondrup, 2007.
- SKS 26 *Journalerne NB31–NB36*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Anne Mette Hansen, and Johnny Kondrup, 2009.
- SKS 27 *Løse papirer*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, Tonny Aagaard Olesen, and Steen Tullberg, 2011.
- SKS 28 *Breve og Dedikationer*, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup, Tonny Aagaard Olesen, and Steen Tullberg, 2013.

Where a citation does not appear in *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* the *Papirer* reference is given:

*Pap.* *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, ed. P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr, E. Torsting, Niels Thulstrup, and Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909–48; 1968–70; 1975–8.

# List of Pseudonyms

In the present work I've tried wherever possible to respect the request Kierkegaard makes of us at the end of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: 'if it should occur to anyone to want to quote a particular passage from the [pseudonymous] books, it is my wish, my prayer, that he will do me the kindness of citing the respective pseudonymous author's name, not mine' (CUP, 1:627/SKS 7, 571).

However, for readers not already well acquainted with his work, Kierkegaard's gallery of pseudonyms may be somewhat disorienting at first. The following *dramatis personae* introduces the pseudonyms encountered in this book.

**A** Author of the papers that comprise the first volume of *Either/Or* (1843), except the final chapter 'The Seducer's Diary,' of which he presents himself the editor). The designation 'A' is given to him by the 'editor' of *Either/Or*, a certain 'Hilarious Bookbinder'. A is a jaded young aesthete, who offers reflections on art, music, and the nature of pleasure and boredom. He is a friend of the older, married, ethical spokesman, Judge William.

**WILLIAM AFHAM** Narrator of 'In Vino Veritas,' the first part of *Stages on Life's Way* (1845), and an attendee at the banquet described therein. The name 'Afham' literally means 'by himself.'

**ANTI-CLIMACUS** The author of *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849) and *Practice in Christianity* (1850). The decision to publish *The Sickness Unto Death* under a pseudonym, with Kierkegaard listed as 'editor,' was made late in the publishing process. In a journal entry, Kierkegaard tells us that 'Johannes Climacus and Anti-Climacus have several things in common; but the difference is that whereas Johannes Climacus places himself so low that he even says himself that he is not a Christian, one seems to be able to detect in Anti-Climacus that he regards himself to be a Christian on an extraordinarily high level...I would place myself higher than Johannes Climacus, lower than Anti-Climacus' (JP, 6431/SKS 22, 130).

**JOHANNES CLIMACUS** Author of *Philosophical Fragments* (1844) and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (1846), and protagonist of the unfinished *Johannes Climacus, or, De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*. The name is taken from the seventh-century Greek monk who wrote the *Ladder of Paradise*. Climacus presents himself in the *Postscript* as a thirty-year-old university graduate, and a self-declared 'idler' and Socratic 'gadfly'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of the character of Johannes Climacus, see Muench 2010.

JOHANNES DE SILENTIO Author of *Fear and Trembling* (1843). *Silentio* attempts to grapple with Abraham's status as the father of faith, and ultimately comes to conclude that he cannot understand Abraham.

JOHANNES THE SEDUCER Author of letters that comprise most of the final chapter of the first part of *Either/Or*. These letters trace the history of Johannes' highly reflective and meticulously planned seduction of a young girl, Cordelia. Details of the seduction story are clearly meant to evoke Kierkegaard's own broken engagement with Regine Olsen (later Regine Schlegel, 1822–1904).

PETRUS MINOR Author of the text known today as *The Book on Adler*, a discussion of theological issues raised by the scandal surrounding clergyman Adolf Peter Adler (1812–69). Adler, a friend of Kierkegaard from their student days, claimed in the preface to his 1843 collected sermons that had received a new divine revelation. Adler was suspended from his duties and subsequently pensioned off. Kierkegaard wrote several drafts of this text but never published it.

JUDGE WILLIAM The author of a series of letters that (along with a sermon from a Jutland pastor that William relates) make up the second part of *Either/Or*. An older married man and a judge in an unspecified court, William delivers long exhortations to his younger friend on the importance of self-integrating ethical choice, using marriage in particular as a paradigm case. William also appears in *Stages on Life's Way*, where he again delivers a lengthy encomium on marriage.

VIGILIUS HAUFNIENSIS The author of *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844). Along with *The Sickness Unto Death*, this is perhaps Kierkegaard's most directly 'philosophical' work; Haufniensis is not strongly characterized, and Kierkegaard himself is listed as author in the first draft. The name means 'The Watchman of Copenhagen' (based on *Hafnia*, the Latin form of the name *København*, 'merchant harbour').

# Introduction

## Kierkegaard and the History of the Self

### The Self in Contemporary Philosophy: A Bleak Picture

William James once declared that the problem of personal identity—the question of what, if anything, it is to be a self, and what makes us the same self across time—was ‘the most puzzling puzzle with which psychology has to deal’.<sup>1</sup> A century later, Peter Goldie could still observe that ‘philosophical questions about the nature of personal identity and of survival remain completely open and unsettled; the questions are as contested and intractable here as anywhere in philosophy’.<sup>2</sup> The dismal truth is that we are no closer to solving this ‘most puzzling puzzle’. Instead, the discussion has fractured across so many disciplines, and so many different assumptions and approaches within each, as to drive some authors to despair. Decades of intense debate hasn’t even yielded an agreed usage of the word ‘self’; on one estimate there are at least thirty-two different senses of the term in the literature, and no doubt there are even more than that in circulation somewhere.<sup>3</sup> As Raymond Martin and John Barresi put it, by the end of the twentieth century the idea of a single thing called the Self ‘had died the death if not of a thousand qualifications, then of a thousand hyphenations’.<sup>4</sup>

Robert Solomon argued that in its modern form the problem of personal identity is ‘actually quite localized and only a couple of hundred years old, a provincial upstart in the Hellenic–Judeo–Christian philosophical tradition’.<sup>5</sup> That’s not strictly true, as we’ll see shortly—indeed this view is an artefact of the process of de-soteriologization that occurs to the personal identity debate during the eighteenth century—but it is remarkable just how comprehensively the tone, agenda, and scope for our contemporary discussions of personal identity were set by writers of the English and Scottish Enlightenments. Despite the passage of the centuries, the rise of empirical science

<sup>1</sup> James 1950, p.330.

<sup>2</sup> Goldie 2012, p.127.

<sup>3</sup> Strawson 2009, p.18.

<sup>4</sup> Martin and Barresi 2011, p.51.

<sup>5</sup> Solomon 1994, p.7. Solomon’s point here is about the personal identity debate, and so is still compatible with the claim, as urged by Galen Strawson (2009, pp.8–9) for instance, that *self-experience* is fundamental to humans and displays little cultural variation.

and the resurgence of interest in identity since the 1960s, philosophy is still digesting and responding to the insights of Locke, Hume, Reid, and Butler.

And in keeping with those origins, these discussions have remained almost entirely the preserve of metaphysicians and philosophers of mind in the analytic tradition. With the exception of Paul Ricoeur,<sup>6</sup> continental philosophy has had far less to say about the topic of the constitution and persistence of selves across time. It goes without saying that the phenomenological analyses of subjectivity offered by Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Levinas all, in their distinctive ways, discuss different aspects of what we might *call* the self. In particular, phenomenologists return again and again to a phenomenal *sense* of self within consciousness,<sup>7</sup> such as Heideggarian *jemeinigkeit*, ‘mineness’, and Sartrean ‘non-positional consciousness’. This sense of self—which, as I’ll argue, has important analogues in Kierkegaard—is an important deliverance of the phenomenological tradition for an increasingly prominent contemporary approach to philosophy of mind, one that unites insights from classical phenomenology and cognitive science and that is also relevant for our discussion of the Kierkegaardian self. Yet ‘the self’ as an enduring entity has operated largely as a locus of suspicion for contemporary continental thought, which, particularly in its poststructuralist and deconstructionist forms, is keen to root out any traces of de-historicized, de-culturalized metaphysics. One thing Kierkegaard has in common with his ‘postmodern’ successors according to Merold Westphal is a distaste for ‘onto-theo-logical speculation’, for they both ‘operate in a world that does not welcome either Platonic souls or Cartesian egos’.<sup>8</sup> Like their analytic counterparts, continental philosophers have scrupulously repudiated Cartesian substantialism, but in the process have largely ignored traditional questions of how selves might persist across time.

Analytic philosophy, by contrast, has had no such qualms, taking the self as an ongoing object of inquiry even while periodically insisting on its distance from Cartesianism.<sup>9</sup> In the process it has offered up a plethora of competing metaphysical theories: animalism, physicalism, psychological continuity theory, four-dimensionalism, closest-continuer theory, constitution theory, and more besides. All attempt to articulate what sort of thing a self is by reference to its conditions of

<sup>6</sup> Most notably in Ricoeur 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Dan Zahavi has argued that this sense of self can be found in *all* major phenomenologists; see e.g. Zahavi 2005, p.11.

<sup>8</sup> Westphal 1996, p.viii. Westphal goes on to note that, like Kierkegaard, many ‘postmodern’ philosophers (a somewhat imprecise term but useful enough here) nonetheless retain the idea of selfhood as something to strive towards rather than an attained state of being.

<sup>9</sup> As Allen Wood, speaking, I suspect, for both traditions, puts it: ‘As philosophers of mind, we are all recovering Cartesians—in the same sense that some people are said to be recovering alcoholics. Like recovering alcoholics, we have our good days and our bad days... In the modern counter-movement to Cartesianism, however, whether continental or Anglophone, there has been little agreement among philosophers about how Cartesianism is to be avoided. More often it is simply *evaded*; the anti-Cartesian philosophical schools are always more successful at labeling their rivals as “Cartesian,” or “solipsistic,” or “monological” than they are at developing a clear and convincing alternative’ (Wood 2006, pp.62–6).

persistence, or put another way, its conditions of re-identification: the circumstances under which we are licenced in identifying a given person as the *same* person as a person existing at another time.<sup>10</sup> Often, though not always, these metaphysical positions are recommended by their proponents because of the ease with which they cohere with our pre-theoretical intuitions about selves and persons—understandably, given the huge practical and ethical importance issues of identity play in our lives (which I'll say more about shortly).

This has left contemporary analytic metaphysics of personal identity at something of an impasse. On one side of this impasse are the standard neo-Lockean approaches to personal identity, according to which the identity of selves across time is secured by psychological 'continuity' or 'connectedness' between persons at different times. On at least some versions of this line of thought, I could theoretically exist if deprived of my body, or continue to exist if I was psychologically continuous with or connected to a different body, say by virtue of a transfer of brain information. On the other side are the broadly physicalist approaches to personal identity, according to which selves are bodies—so it is not so much that I *have* a body as that I *just am* my body. The idea of my continuing to exist without my body, or some specified minimal part thereof (such as my brain) is therefore incoherent. An important subset of this approach is animalism, according to which selves are individual human animals; my survival across time consists in the maintenance of unified organic organization (at some minimal level of metabolic function), rather than simple physical continuity.<sup>11</sup>

I offer this quite simplistic overview of the current state the discipline simply to point out that if we take intuitions about identity seriously (and not every philosopher does set much store in them), this split between psychological and physical forms of continuity leaves us hopelessly stranded between two rival sets of intuitions. On the one hand, in a post-Cartesian context, the pull of physicalism is undeniably strong, and both physicalism and animalism can accommodate everyday judgements about identity that psychological continuity approaches, save at the cost of enormous strain, cannot. For instance, as Eric T. Olson argues, we take it that each of us was once a baby—but what forms of identity-bearing psychological continuity could possibly hold between an adult and a foetus, or between an adult and a toddler, or even between a toddler and a foetus? And how could I be the same person as a future human being in a persistent vegetative state, who has *no* psychological properties and therefore nothing I could be psychologically continuous with? Olson's conclusion is that 'person', understood to mean a thinking rational being with psychological continuity across time, is a phase sortal, like 'foetus', 'teenager', or 'acrobat', that applies to some phases of a given animal's life but not others.<sup>12</sup> The underlying

<sup>10</sup> On re-identification, see P. F. Strawson 1959.

<sup>11</sup> On animalism, see e.g. Olson 1997; Noonan 1998; Mackie 1999; Noonan 2001; Johansson 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Olson 1997, pp.29–31.

substance to which that phase sortal applies—what we essentially *are*—is an individual animal.

Yet this move salvages one set of intuitions about identity at the cost of jettisoning another:<sup>13</sup> the intuition that prudential concern and personal identity go together. We customarily assume (what Olson calls the ‘Transplant Intuition’) that if Bill’s brain or—more contentiously—Bill’s mind was somehow transplanted into Bob’s body in a way that preserved psychological continuity, Bill’s identity would go with it; thus the person that wakes up after the transplant would be Bill in a new body, not Bob with a particularly severe case of amnesia and delusional beliefs about being Bill.<sup>14</sup> We assume, moreover, that Bill could reasonably anticipate experiences that would befall Bob’s body after the operation (he could fearfully anticipate weeks of post-operative pain, for instance) and we tend to assume that we can *only* anticipate experiences that *we* will have in this particular way. So it seems that we find ourselves in a bind: admit that the self is a body or an animal, and give up on our sense that psychological continuity matters to identity in some essential sense, or go with the psychological continuity model and give up our belief that the infant my mother is holding in this faded Polaroid is *me*, and insist that my fear of falling into a permanent vegetative state is unfounded as it cannot be *me* who is in such a state. If there is a way to have our intuitive cake and eat it too, philosophers have yet to find it.

This impasse might seem like a mere headache for metaphysicians, nothing more. Yet the problem of personal identity is not simply born of intellectual curiosity. It emerges from central and irreducibly practical features of our everyday lives: our self-regarding concerns, our concerns for the imputability of moral praiseworthiness and blameworthiness, our concern to be compensated for our efforts, and our concern for survival itself.<sup>15</sup> When we put off taking a vacation this year to save up our annual leave, it’s because *we* want that six-week South Pacific cruise next year; if we were told that we were working now so that someone *exactly like* us would be sipping cocktails on a beach in Bora Bora in a year’s time, we’d find the whole thing horribly unjust. Likewise if we were to be punished for something someone *exactly like* us did, or if we were told that while we were about to be killed, someone *exactly like* us would appear at the moment of our death and move into our house, take over our job, and slip into our family and social roles.

Some have argued that these sorts of thought-experiments are quite meaningless:<sup>16</sup> we never *do* encounter such exotic situations as the creation of perfect replicas, brain

<sup>13</sup> Actually, more than one. Another example is the infamous ‘corpse problem’: animalism implies that at death an animal ceases to exist and a new thing, a corpse, comes into being, such that we can’t, strictly, say the corpse *used to be* the person who died.

<sup>14</sup> See for instance Perry 1975, pp.3–6.

<sup>15</sup> On these ‘Four Features’ of experience that motivate the question of personal identity, see Schechtman 1996. For a similar claim, see Buchanan 1988, p.285.

<sup>16</sup> For a sustained argument against thought-experiments in personal identity theory, see Wilkes 1988.

transplants, people splitting in two like amoebas, teleportation, and all the other science fiction scenarios that philosophers have been conjuring up since Locke imagined a prince and a cobbler mysteriously swapping minds during the night.<sup>17</sup> But even in real life we do, in fact, encounter live questions of identity. Some are idle daydream ('If my parents had never met, would I exist? What if they'd gotten pregnant a year earlier, or later?'), but others are all too tragically real. The identity-destroying features of conditions like Alzheimer's disease and progressive dementia are often remarked upon. My grandmother lived with end-stage Alzheimer's for over ten years, and I've always felt that, in a more than merely metaphorical sense, she died two deaths: a horribly gradual one that took her away from us piece by piece, and, years later, a metabolic one that seemed more like an epilogue than an ending.<sup>18</sup> Some non-fatal illnesses that radically change a person's personality or take away their memory also seem to volatilize identity in this way. Another family member has suffered anterograde amnesia for over sixty years. She remembers with great clarity her life as a young woman, right up until she got sick, but has a severely compromised relationship to her autobiography from that point onwards. Major life-changes—grandchildren, moving house, her husband's death—take several months to make their way into her semantic memory, while conversations are completely forgotten within a matter of minutes.

And every day, thousands of people face identity issues in far more sudden and jarring circumstances, like the end-of-life decisions that have to be made in cases of brain death. The neurologist Antonio Damasio admits that:

Few things are as sad to watch as the sudden and forced disappearance of the conscious mind in someone who remains alive, and few things are as painful to explain to a family. How does one look a person in the eye and make clear that the quiet state of a lifetime's companion may appear like sleep but is not sleep; that there is nothing benign or restorative about this way of resting; that the once-sentient being may never return to sentience?<sup>19</sup>

I know Damasio is right: I watched my father die like that. In such crises, phrases like 'it's no longer really *her*, you know' come to play a serious, if ambiguous and highly contestable, role in our moral dialogue. And then, of course, there are the more practical identity crises, including cases of people so traumatized or displaced that their self-conception has been shattered; the cry of 'I don't know who I am anymore!' might not impress metaphysicians, but it's not simply rhetorical, either.

Still, it's at least philosophically permissible to bracket the practical and ethical questions associated with identity completely and simply concentrate on the metaphysics, as Olson quite explicitly does.<sup>20</sup> (Much the same move is available to phenomenologists too: Dan Zahavi, in his discussion of the experiential underpinnings of narrative identity, endorses aspects of Ricoeur's view of selfhood but elects not to

<sup>17</sup> Locke 1975, p.340.

<sup>19</sup> Damasio 2000, p.7.

<sup>18</sup> Belshaw (2009, p.56) denies that we ever speak of two deaths this way.

<sup>20</sup> Olson 1997, p.4.



‘follow Ricoeur on his excursion into ethics’.)<sup>21</sup> Metaphysicians, according to this way of thinking, should be allowed to leave aside questions about egocentric concern, prudential reasoning, anticipation, moral imputability, and the question of what *matters* in survival, and simply focus on the ontological facts of the matter. Others, such as Derek Parfit (whose work on personal identity theory has unarguably been more widely influential than any philosopher since Hume) *do* address the question of our self-regarding concerns, but in a way that prioritizes metaphysics over intuition. If it turns out—as, for Parfit, it does—that there are no ‘deep further facts’ about identity beneath facts about degrees of psychological relatedness, then we should adapt our practical and affective attitudes to this reality. If our pre-theoretical attitudes and intuitions fail to track metaphysical realities, then so much the worse for those attitudes.<sup>22</sup> In cases of both question-bracketing and Parfitian attitude-realignment, the assumption is that identity facts, if such exist, are conceptually prior to whatever practical and moral judgements they may licence or attitudes they may engender. It may be that moral facts, such as facts about imputability and blameworthiness, supervene upon facts about identity, but that subvenient base can be described in wholly non-moral terms.

## Metaphysical vs Practical Identity

Other philosophers, in seeking to give the moral basis of personal identity questions their due, have gone in a very different direction. There has been a proliferation of approaches according to which personal identity is a matter of articulating a normative *practical* identity.<sup>23</sup> According to this sort of account, a person’s identity is something that they actively shape, through reflective commitment and certain types of volitional comportment. For instance, Harry G. Frankfurt speaks of the formation of second-order volitions—those volitions we have about which of our first-order volitions will be efficacious, such as where I have a first-order desire to eat fried chicken, another first-order desire to only eat healthy food, and second-order desire that my first-order desire to eat healthy food be the one that is acted upon—as a process of ‘identifying’ with some of our volitions.<sup>24</sup> Such a form of identification is not the same as *re-identifying* (reflectively) ourselves with past and future selves (as the metaphysical approach seeks to find criteria for doing), but of actively forming a volitional and dispositional set or framework which we endorse as being *us*. Christine Korsgaard develops a Kantian, agency-centred account of personal identity, according to which to be a self is to articulate ‘the description under which you value yourself and find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking’.<sup>25</sup> Such a description provides an Humean bundle of psychological events

<sup>21</sup> Zahavi 2005, p.114. <sup>22</sup> Parfit 1984.

<sup>23</sup> On this shift, see Schechtman 1996, esp. pp.68–70; MacKenzie 2008a, pp.3–17.

<sup>24</sup> Frankfurt 1988, pp.80–94. <sup>25</sup> Korsgaard 1996a, p.102.

with a kind of deeper integration, giving it both a backward-directed explanatory coherence and a forward-directed regulative one. It is not far from this practical conception of identity to a *narrative* conception of identity, whereby this practical identity has a diachronic unity analogous to that of a story. This narrative understanding of the self has found adherents as diverse as Daniel Dennett, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, J. David Velleman, and Paul Ricoeur. Narrative identity theory goes beyond psychological continuity theories in that narrativity confers not just *continuity* across time, but a specific type of *intelligibility*. To tell the *story* of our actions and emotions is to make them comprehensible to ourselves in—so the narrativists claim—a uniquely unifying way.

A key merit of all these approaches is their insistence on taking seriously the significance of the first-person perspective. Both psychological and physical continuity are available to inspection by an external observer; yet our from-the-inside experience of ourselves as free agents is qualitatively different. Aside from the phenomenal property of ‘mineness’ mentioned above, the self qua agent is not simply an interpreter of its internal coherence (as an outside observer, such as a therapist, would be) but the *author* of that coherent identity, even if, given the contingency of my life circumstances and the background of socially determined meanings into which I am born, I can never be more than its *co-author*.<sup>26</sup> According to Korsgaard, this authorial aspect allows our identity to survive radical changes that would otherwise destroy it. Externally imposed changes can indeed alienate us from our past and future, but when we actively and willingly bring such changes about ourselves, ‘the sort of continuity needed for identity may be preserved, even if I become very different’.<sup>27</sup>

Yet not everyone accepts that metaphysics and ethics *can* be separated in this way,<sup>28</sup> and in any case it is not clear that a purely practical account of identity will do any better at satisfying some of our prudential and ethical concerns. Like early critics of the Lockean rejection of thinking immaterial substance, we might object that the self, the object of my self-regarding concern, has here been reduced to a mere ethical fiction.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, for someone like Dennett, the self *is* ‘an abstract object, a theorist’s fiction’,<sup>30</sup> no more ‘real’ than the centre of gravity is for a physicist—but like the centre of gravity, it is an enormously *useful* fiction. Yet a curious feature of our self-regarding concern is how impervious it seems to this sort of metaphysical disenchantment. Reductionists have offered thought-experiments that seem to show that questions about personal identity admit of no non-trivial, determinate answers.<sup>31</sup> Yet

<sup>26</sup> MacIntyre 1984, p.99; Ricoeur 1992, p.160.

<sup>27</sup> Korsgaard 1996b, p.380.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, Caroline West (2008, p.59) argues that if ‘person’ is a nonnatural social kind rather than a natural kind, more like ‘nation’ or ‘corporation’ than ‘water’ or ‘gold’, then value-theoretic connections between person-stages may indeed *constitute* the metaphysical relation of identity—in which case we can’t simply separate metaphysical from practical identity.

<sup>29</sup> Martin and Barresi 2000, p.58.

<sup>30</sup> Dennett 1992, p.105.

<sup>31</sup> Such as Williams 1973, pp.55–6; Parfit 1984, pp.231–4.

the concern that animates such questions is notoriously hard to exorcise: knowing that there's no significant, non-arbitrary point at which identity conditions between me and a future self suddenly cease to hold seems to do little to alter the all-or-nothing character of egocentric concern. Being told that there are no 'deep', more-than-merely conventional answers to questions about identity doesn't seem to enable us to stop asking them.<sup>32</sup> And being told that the referent of 'me' is a practical identity emerging from my agential and self-narrating activity doesn't seem to silence this concern either. While the practical identity approach may answer to more of our ethical concerns than the purely metaphysical approach, there still seems to be a gap between our theoretical and intuitive understandings of self.

Of course, that could simply be dismissed as a Cartesian hangover: we've been thinking of ourselves as some sort of immaterial substance for so long that our intuitions stubbornly keep tracking an all-or-nothing conception of self even when such a conception is no longer theoretically tenable. The Cartesian picture in which, in Nishitani Keiji's evocative phrase, 'each individual ego became like a lonely but well-fortified island floating on a sea of dead matter'<sup>33</sup> is taking us a long time to shake off. Perhaps so—but the vehemence with which many of Locke's critics objected to his rejection of the soul as the seat of identity surely wasn't simply due to a purely *philosophical* commitment to dualism. Instead, what they feared was that this new philosophy of the self could not answer to another, altogether more terrifying, set of concerns.

## Soteriological Origins

The turn away from metaphysics is motivated, as we've seen, by an acknowledgement of the practical and ethical concerns that underlie questions of identity. At the historical outset, however, the specific form of these motivating concerns was not simply prudential or moral, but soteriological. And that outset is much further back in time than the quote from Solomon above would suggest. The Classical world didn't ask about the identity of persons across time, but whether individuals could persist after death; as the neo-Platonic answer to this question became woven into Christian theology, discussion turned to specific problems posed by the doctrine of bodily resurrection.<sup>34</sup> Patristic writers such as Athenagoras, Irenaeus, and Tertullian through to Origen and Augustine all wrestled with questions of identity and continuity between pre-mortem and post-resurrection bodies.<sup>35</sup> Jewish and Muslim writers grappled with similar questions; medieval Jewish writers appealed to an indestructible bone in the spine, the *luz*, as the bearer of continuity between the

<sup>32</sup> On this topic, see Rudd 2005, p.415; Schechtman 1996, pp.63–4; Martin 1998, p.112; Stokes 2013b.

<sup>33</sup> Nishitani 1982, p.11. <sup>34</sup> Martin and Barresi 2000, pp.2–3; 2006.

<sup>35</sup> Martin and Barresi 2006, pp.56–74.

pre- and post-resurrection person.<sup>36</sup> The self that was asked about in this context was understood as—and cared about as—the subject of a future eschatological judgement and recipient of eternal reward or punishment; questions about its identity and persistence conditions were raised only with regard to this posthumous function. The later rationalist identification of the self with thinking immaterial substance gave a new philosophical expression to the theological idea of the soul, an immaterial core whose numerical identity could survive the period of disembodiment between death and resurrection.

But as the Enlightenment wore on, and rationalism came up against empiricism, this happy marriage of theology and metaphysics started to break down. In asserting that personal, numerical identity was secured by sameness of *consciousness* rather than sameness of immaterial substance—regardless of whether such substances existed or not—Locke opened the door to a new science of the mind that had no use for the increasingly problematic metaphysics of the soul. As Martin and Barresi put it, the eighteenth century witnessed a gradual but inexorable naturalization of the concept of spirit: the old discipline of pneumatology, encompassing the supernatural spirits of God, angels, humans, and nonhuman animals, gave way to a new, naturalistic (and often materialist) ‘Mental Philosophy’, which in turn split into the approaches that became philosophy of mind and empirical psychology.<sup>37</sup> By the time Kant revolutionized European philosophy with his transcendental idealist account of self-experience, the ghost in the machine had been, if not exorcized, at least stripped of its pretensions to immateriality.<sup>38</sup> And in this process of naturalization, the soteriological concerns that had driven the topic of personal identity in the first place were quietly dispensed with; the new ‘science of man’, as Hume called it,<sup>39</sup> simply lost interest in these questions. This was entirely in keeping with the dominant religious tenor of Enlightenment Europe: a disenchanted, mechanistic universe understood more and more of its moral and political resources in immanent terms, and correspondingly had less and less conceptual need of an afterlife that would correct for the injustices and evils of this world. As Charles Taylor notes in his magisterial study of the rise of unbelief in modernity, the afterlife in the eighteenth century increasingly tends to be viewed as a place of ‘peace, repose, the reunion with loved ones. The horizon of transformation, in particular in relation to our life here, recedes.’<sup>40</sup> The ‘decline of Hell’ that begins in this period makes questions of soteriological judgement considerably less pressing, and thus considerably less salient for philosophical reckonings of the self.

<sup>36</sup> Reichman and Rosner 1996; Johnston 2010, pp.108–9.

<sup>37</sup> This history is laid out perspicuously throughout Martin and Barresi 2000.

<sup>38</sup> It’s only fair to note that one can still find defenders of the dualist soul-as-mental-substance hypothesis today; see for instance Swinburne 1986.

<sup>39</sup> Hume 2007, pp.4–6. <sup>40</sup> Taylor 2007, p.261.

Yet this certainly isn't the outcome that Locke had intended. Locke is not starting from a place of detached intellectual curiosity; nor, unlike his rationalist forebears, is he absorbed in visions of grand celestial mechanics or the austere, abstract majesty of mathematics. Rather, as we'll see, in keeping with the Puritan tradition of religious self-examination in which he was raised,<sup>41</sup> the ultimate concern of his discussion of identity is eschatological.<sup>42</sup> His ultimate concern is salvation, not simply metaphysics for metaphysics' sake.

Kierkegaard only ever mentions Locke twice, in notes on lectures by Martensen and Schelling (SKS 19, 132; 325), and there is nothing to suggest he ever read Locke. But the Lockean inheritance, particularly via Hume, had an enormous influence on the thinking of Kant and his successors. Having rejected the obscurities inherent in the notion of an immaterial spirit as early as his discussions of Swedenborg in 1766,<sup>43</sup> Kant went on to reduce the ego to a purely formal (or at least unknowable) property of the transcendental unity of apperception (e.g. A386: 'The identity of the consciousness of Myself in different times is therefore only a formal condition of my thoughts and their connection, but it does not prove at all the numerical identity of my subject').<sup>44</sup> Moreover, he developed the idea of a day of judgement (*jüngster Tag*, the 'Youngest Day') into something more like a regulative ideal rather than a literal, if supernatural, event to come.<sup>45</sup>

This de-substantialization of the ego and de-literalization of eschatology set the stage for the sidelining of soteriological concerns in idealism's extensive discussions of self-consciousness, particularly in the late idealist context in which Kierkegaard was educated. The Hegelian collapsing of the 'inner and the outer' that so disturbed Kierkegaard right from the start of his pseudonymous writings (EO, 1:3/SKS 2, 11), and consciousness' continual sublation into higher unities held particularly stark implications for traditional eschatological ideas. In the years immediately following Hegel's death, the question of whether the Hegelian system was compatible with traditional Christian doctrines of personal identity and resurrection was fiercely contested; indeed, this was a proximate cause of the rift between left- and right-Hegelianism.<sup>46</sup> Key figures in Kierkegaard's milieu, such as Johan Ludvig Heiberg, Hans Lassen Martensen, and Kierkegaard's favourite teacher Poul Martin Møller, were either participants in or keen observers of this debate.<sup>47</sup> While some, such as Karl Friedrich Göschel, attempted to reconcile Hegelianism with Christian doctrines of personal immortality, others found that speculative philosophy rendered such beliefs unsustainable. As David Friedrich Strauss told Martensen during the latter's visit to Tübingen in 1835, 'I had scarce finished reading Hegel's *Phenomenology of*

<sup>41</sup> Seigel 2005, p.95. <sup>42</sup> As argued in e.g. Forstrom 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Van der Ruhr 2000, pp.217–18. <sup>44</sup> Kant 1998, p.423.

<sup>45</sup> Kant 1983, pp.93–4. <sup>46</sup> On this debate, see Czakó 2008.

<sup>47</sup> Møller 1837. See Kjældgaard 2005; Stewart 2007a, pp.37–53; Czakó 2008; Stokes 2009; Marks 2010.

*Spirit* before that belief fell away from me like a withered leaf.’<sup>48</sup> Johan Ludvig Heiberg, the leading (and most staunchly partisan) Hegelian in Golden Age Denmark, seems to have enthusiastically adopted a Hegelian picture of an ‘afterlife’ that amounted to the sublation of the individual into Spirit—a prospect that utterly appalled his mother, the novelist Thomasine Gyllembourg, according to a particularly amusing scene recorded in Johanne Louise Heiberg’s memoirs.<sup>49</sup> A decade later, Kierkegaard has his pseudonym Johannes Climacus declare, matter-of-factly, that:

I know that some have found immortality in Hegel; others have not. I know that I have not found it in the system, since it is unreasonable to look for it there anyway, because in a fantastical sense all systematic thinking is *sub specie aeterni* . . . and to that extent immortality is there as eternity. But this immortality is not at all the one inquired about, since the question is about the immortality of a mortal, and that question is not answered by showing that the eternal is immortal, because the eternal is, after all, not the mortal, and the immortality of the eternal is a tautology and a misuse of words. (CUP, 1:171/SKS 7, 158–9)

The disentangling of eschatology and personal identity within philosophy of mind (and its emerging offshoot, empirical psychology) was more or less complete by the close of the nineteenth century, such that James could dismiss the old requirement for ‘a soul which *is* at the judgement day all that it ever was’ as neither psychologically demonstrable nor desirable, an irrelevancy for modern readers ‘who are less insatiate for retribution than their grandfathers’.<sup>50</sup> Personal identity and soteriology never *completely* parted ways, insofar as philosophers of religion have continued to attend to the problems that personal identity presents for beliefs about immortality and resurrection.<sup>51</sup> But the Enlightenment’s prioritization of the metaphysical question of identity, to the detriment of the ethical and the soteriological, has held sway. The soteriological concerns that originally animated questions of personal identity have been largely effaced; it’s tacitly assumed that pre-Enlightenment pneumatology is to modern philosophy of mind roughly what alchemy and astrology are to chemistry and astronomy.

<sup>48</sup> Martensen 1882, p.131.

<sup>49</sup> ‘The two gentlemen [Heiberg and Martensen] had discussed Hegel’s view that the immortality of individuals was dissolved in the entire great universe. At this Heiberg’s mother was completely beside herself. Again and again she came back, in increasing stages of undress, as she attacked the doctrine. To this attack Heiberg only responded “Go to bed, it’s late.” “Merge together!” she exclaimed, “Do you think I will merge together with the many loathsome drops?”—“Go to bed!”’ quoted in Stewart 2007b, p.543.

<sup>50</sup> James 1950, p.349. James was a major figure in the early years of psychical research and a keen investigator of spiritualist phenomena, and the spiritualists themselves were scornful of traditional eschatological concepts such as damnation. Spiritualism offered an empirically backed belief in an afterlife and an optimistic soteriology of (eventual) universal salvation, one that suited an age of apparently boundless scientific progress. On spiritualist epistemology and soteriology, see Vaczy Kragh 2002a, 2002b. On the relationship between Danish Hegelianism and spiritualism, see Stokes 2009.

<sup>51</sup> As one early example, Robert Audi (1976) uses the metaphysics of personal identity to object to John Hick’s argument for the possibility of ‘Eschatological Verification’ of religious beliefs.

## Kierkegaard on the Self

Seen in the context laid out above, Kierkegaard's account of selfhood is a curious mix of the modern and the anti-modern. Despite his antipathy to the speculative philosophical programme, Kierkegaard shares many of the assumptions of late idealism—including its rejection of Cartesian ego-substantialism and any pretheoretical beliefs that might imply or require it. Post-Kantian idealism can profitably be understood as a series of attempts to overcome the scepticism engendered by Kant's divorcing of phenomenon and noumenon. This was to be done by re-grounding philosophy (as Kant had done) in the experience of consciousness, but in a way that gave metaphysical primacy to the positing consciousness rather than some inaccessible realm of things-in-themselves. This made the ego the wellspring of all representations in consciousness as well as of itself—yet these egos were a very different animal from their Cartesian counterparts. Despite Fichte's attempt to ground philosophy in *das Ich*, an ego or Absolute Self that was the source of all representations and therefore irreducible to anything within the empirical world, this ego was not to be understood as a persisting, thinking immaterial substance à la Descartes, but as pure intellectual *activity*: 'The intellect, for idealism, is an *act*, and absolutely nothing more; we should not even call it an *active* something, for this expression refers to something subsistent in which activity inheres.'<sup>52</sup> In Hegel too, despite his disagreements with figures like Fichte and Schelling, the essence of the self is bound up in relation and activity rather than simple persistence. As consciousness gradually comes to a progressively better self-understanding, it becomes aware that both it *and* the world around it are functions of the same Spirit, a single, universal, animating power.<sup>53</sup> Spirit, in its freedom, emerges in the interrelation of elements in the world (including corporeal ones), not as a spiritual substance inhabiting a body:

Personality implies that as *this* person: (i) I am completely determined on every side (in my inner caprice, impulse, and desire, as well as by immediate external facts) and so finite; yet (ii) none the less I am simply and solely self-relation, and therefore in finitude I know myself as something *infinite, universal, and free*.<sup>54</sup>

Kierkegaard's understanding of the self is very much shaped by this idealist context.<sup>55</sup> David Kangas notes that Fichte's account of subjectivity 'unquestionably gave Kierkegaard the conceptual resources to break from an ontological description of

<sup>52</sup> Fichte 1982, p.21.

<sup>53</sup> Seigel 2005, p.407.

<sup>54</sup> Hegel 2008, pp.53–4.

<sup>55</sup> Jon Stewart has pointed out to me that physicalist conceptions of the self were not completely unknown within Kierkegaard's intellectual context, as evidenced by the 'Howitz Affair'. Franz Gothard Howitz's 1824 article 'On Madness and Ascribing Responsibility, A Contribution to Psychology and Jurisprudence' argued against the Kantian conception of noumenal freedom, on the basis of a purely physical (and wholly deterministic) understanding of moral psychology. Sibbern, Mynster, and Heiberg all offered rejoinders to this physicalist account, with Mynster defending a Kantian conception of freedom while Sibbern and Heiberg both offered idealist arguments that were either implicitly (Sibbern) or explicitly (Heiberg) Hegelian in character. See Stewart 2007a, pp.136–52.

the subject in favour of one pursued through categories of self-consciousness: namely, those of reflection, act, will, freedom',<sup>56</sup> and in keeping with this Fichtean tenor, Kierkegaard's articulations of selfhood are thoroughly non-substantialist. Indeed, as early as *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Judge William actively rejects the notion of the self as a substance to which any psychological predicates could be assigned without compromising its identity, as if an individual 'could be changed continually and yet remain the same, as if his innermost being were an algebraic symbol that could signify anything whatever it is assumed to be' (EO, 2:215/SKS 3, 206). Kierkegaard's pseudonyms locate selfhood, even when spoken of as 'spirit', not in the superaddition of a Cartesian ego or immaterial soul to the human animal, but in a relational dynamic whereby a mass of psychological facts and dispositions relates to itself and its environment in an irreducibly first-personal way. It is in the specific *way* in which this psychology relates to itself that a human being comes to constitute a self. Selfhood for Kierkegaard, like intellect for Fichte, is pure activity. Hubert Dreyfus notes that one of the things Heidegger takes from Kierkegaard (largely without acknowledgement) is the latter's 'understanding of the self as a set of factors that are defined by the stand this structure takes on itself'<sup>57</sup>—which, if true, suggests that Kierkegaard was instrumental in transmitting a certain type of relational, non-substantialist conception of self between post-Hegelian idealism and post-Husserlian phenomenology.

Yet Kierkegaard's discussions of the self don't just sound modern in their own context, but in ours as well. Like contemporary neo-Lockeans, Kierkegaard regards selfhood as a status that holds by virtue of relations between psychological events: for a self to be co-identical with some past or future self is for it to be related to those selves in a particular way. And the specific mode of this psychological relation also has a modern flavour to it. For neo-Lockeans, the forms of psychological continuity that bind person-stages into a single individual are (when specified at all) largely passive: the persistence of memory, dispositional properties, beliefs, and so on. For Kierkegaard, by contrast, a human being (regarded as a set of diachronic physical and psychological facts) becomes a self through a process of active appropriation, variously referred to as 'choice' and 'relating to oneself' (*at forholde sig til sig selv*). (This split between the *human being* and the *self* is also one that, as we'll see in coming chapters, has emerged as an important feature of the personal identity debate in the last three decades.)

Moreover, Kierkegaard sees the cultivation of a consistent practical identity across time as essential to selfhood, in ways that seem to align him with contemporary practical identity approaches to selfhood. In his first published work, a review of Hans Christian Andersen's novel *Only a Fiddler*, Kierkegaard berates Andersen for lacking a 'life-view' (*Livs-Anskuelse*). He contrasts Andersen with Gyllembourg, who

<sup>56</sup> Kangas 2007b, p.67.

<sup>57</sup> Dreyfus 1991, p.299.



he praises for, as Richard M. Summers puts it, developing a life-view that ‘accepts reality in full awareness of its imperfections and finds its task there’.<sup>58</sup> The lack of such a life-view is not simply a problem for Andersen’s novels, but for Andersen as a person: without a life-view, Andersen is no more than a ‘possibility of a personality, that to become such needs a strong life-development’ (EPW, 70/SKS 1, 26).<sup>59</sup> This notion of a viewpoint that integrates the personality and normatively structures one’s understanding of and volitional responses to the world echoes throughout Kierkegaard’s authorship. Such a claim, and Kierkegaard’s conception of the self as a freely chosen ethical project, resonate with contemporary claims that identity is a function of ‘ground projects’,<sup>60</sup> second-order volitions and normative self-description. This is especially salient with respect to Judge William’s discussion of self-constitution in *Either/Or*, for William sees the choice of oneself within socially defined ethical roles (especially marriage) as integrating a mass of otherwise atomistic psychological elements into a coherent, diachronically extended self. In so doing, selves acquire themselves as a ‘history’—a term pregnant with possibilities, for the Danish *historie* means both ‘history’ and ‘story’. Thus Judge William has served as the point of departure for readings of Kierkegaard, such as those offered by John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd, which align him with contemporary narrativist accounts of personal identity. If the narrativist reading is correct, then Kierkegaard’s philosophical ‘contemporaries’ with respect to selfhood are figures like Alasdair MacIntyre and Paul Ricoeur, not to mention the many active proponents of narrative identity working today.

‘But,’ as George Connell reminds us, ‘alongside the Kierkegaard who surprises readers by his preternatural contemporaneity stands another, antimodern Kierkegaard.’<sup>61</sup> Kierkegaard’s goal, as is particularly evident in *The Sickness Unto Death* and in his veronymous discourses, is ultimately a religious one. The facts of selfhood are always theological ones for Kierkegaard; while *Sickness* is clearly a work of philosophical anthropology it is also inescapably a work of creation theology as well,<sup>62</sup> and the overtly Christocentric focus of the second half of the book can obscure the theological basis that’s present right from the outset. Consider the infamously obtuse opening passages of Part A of *The Sickness Unto Death*. Here Anti-Climacus tells us that ‘Such a relation, that relates to itself, a self, must either have established itself, or be established by an other’—yet instead of arguing for either option he simply declares that ‘A human self *is* such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates to itself and in relating to itself relates to an other’ (SUD, 13/SKS 11, 129, translation modified, my emphasis). The language may be reminiscent of speculative

<sup>58</sup> Summers 1999, p.47.

<sup>59</sup> Even here, there is already an intimation of the importance of soteriology to one’s self-conception, for Kierkegaard claims that ‘the life-view proper commences first . . . at the hour of one’s death’ (EPW, 77/SKS 1, 33). I’m grateful to Adam Buben for this observation.

<sup>60</sup> Williams 1982, pp.1–19.

<sup>61</sup> Connell 2011, p.22.

<sup>62</sup> See e.g. Lübcke 1984.

idealism, but this apparently unearned assumption that selves *are* established by some external power tells us that Anti-Climacus' programme is to outline an ontology of the self *from within* a framework that assumes an orthodox creation theology beforehand. Here Kierkegaard registers his distance from the idealist account of subjectivity as its own ground:<sup>63</sup> the Kierkegaardian self is always a created self, a self that finds God as the ultimate 'criterion' for its own self-actualization (SUD, 79/SKS 11, 193),<sup>64</sup> and Christ as its prototype for emulation.

In addition to this creaturely account of selfhood, Kierkegaard's account of the self strives to preserve (without any kind of apologetic argument) a key feature of revealed doctrine: the self as a subject of eternal judgement. Kierkegaard is fully aware that this swims against the post-Enlightenment current. In one of the *Upbuilding Discourses* of 1844, Kierkegaard laments that the concept of eternal salvation had become 'a loose and idle phrase, at times virtually forgotten, or arbitrarily left out of the language, or indifferently set aside as an old-fashioned turn of speech no longer used but retained only because it is so quaint' (EUD, 254/SKS 5, 251). As if to redress this forgetting of soteriology, the concept of eternal judgement can be found throughout Kierkegaard's religious writings, and in *The Sickness Unto Death* and *The Concept of Anxiety* he lays out conceptions of the self and time, respectively, that make such a judgement possible. His category of the 'single individual' (*Enkelt*), the 'self-before-God', is defined and individuated primarily by eschatological responsibility. The single individual, as we're told in 'An Occasional Discourse' (echoing *The Concept of Anxiety*) lives simultaneously in time and eternity. This changes the temporality of the self in important ways, for the possibilities of human time and the possibilities of eschatological time are radically different: while human life is a gradual passing-away of possibilities, the relation to the eternal, and the tasks of repentance and hope that this relationship engenders, is omnipresent and constant throughout that life. This dual temporality, as we'll see in our discussions of *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, marks a fundamental difference between Kierkegaardian selfhood and the neo-Lockean search for the persistence conditions of persons.

Moreover, the single individual (or the self-before-God in *Sickness*) is enjoined to make an accounting for their life to an extraordinary level of detail: 'every idle word must be repeated in the transformation of eternity!' (UDVS, 15/SKS 8, 131), 'everything—down to the smallest, down to the superfluous words that are spoken' (UDVS, 66/SKS 8, 174) will be answered for in eternal judgement. According to Anti-Climacus, 'everyone arrives in eternity bringing along with him and delivering his own absolutely accurate record of every least trifle he has committed or omitted' (SUD, 124/SKS 11, 235). While Kierkegaard uses soul (*sjæl*) to mean something more like 'mind' rather than anything substantialist, the eschatological identity of the

<sup>63</sup> On which, see Söderquist 2007; Kangas 2007a.

<sup>64</sup> On this topic, see Pattison 1997, pp.70–84.

single individual is clearly co-extensive with the ‘soul which *is* at the judgement day all that it ever was’ that James found so *outré*.

The Kierkegaardian self, then, harkens back to a soteriological understanding of the self that modernity had rendered philosophically untenable, but does so in the language and assumptions of a relational psychology that is as fresh today as it was then. As Simon Podmore puts it, his discussion of the self is ‘an attempt to rehabilitate older theological truths without undermining orthodox biblical Christianity (as he perceived Hegelianism to be doing), while at the same time speaking within and critiquing the lexicon of modernity’.<sup>65</sup> This is not to say that Kierkegaard articulates some new metaphysical basis for old Christian claims; rather, he re-articulates selfhood from within a Christian soteriological perspective, outlining the way self and time appear *to the believer*. In these respects, the Kierkegaardian project is stubbornly pre-Enlightenment. It strives to preserve the self’s status as the personally immortal subject of an eternal judgement, a status that Hegelianism had, at least implicitly, made indefensible. Yet Kierkegaard does not aim to *defend* traditional beliefs via philosophical apology, or re-found them on a new philosophical or epistemological basis, but to show, as Tamara Monet Marks puts it, what is *at stake* in believing traditional doctrines such as bodily resurrection.<sup>66</sup>

In short, Kierkegaardian selfhood is both philosophically progressive and theologically conservative—a tension that, with regard to the question of self and identity, is enormously productive.

## Kierkegaard and Contemporary Philosophy

This somewhat lengthy historical overview of the question of identity is provided here to help situate Kierkegaard in relation to the intellectual currents that have shaped the discourse on the self from Locke onwards. However, my intention in this book is not so much to bring Kierkegaard into dialogue with his past, but with his future. This is likely to be controversial, so let me take a few moments to explain.

As noted, there has been a remarkable proliferation in discussions of the self in the last forty years, especially in the analytic tradition. Yet Kierkegaard has been conspicuously absent from these discussions. Figures like Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor have seen Kierkegaard as a figure of at least some importance in the *history* of self and reason,<sup>67</sup> but he has not been treated as having anything of note to say to contemporary philosophical discussions of the nature of selfhood. Lest this be blamed entirely on the analytic disdain for historical topics, it should be noted that things aren’t much better on the continental side of the fence: even Ricoeur, in his

<sup>65</sup> Podmore 2011, p.xx.      <sup>66</sup> Marks 2010, p.181.

<sup>67</sup> MacIntyre 1984, pp.39–43; Taylor 1992, pp.450–3. Jerrold Seigel’s expansive (though by his own admission not exhaustive) history of the concept of selfhood never once mentions Kierkegaard, even in its discussion of Heidegger. On this omission (as well as that of Sartre, and others), see Izenberg 2005, p.391.

laudable attempt to bring continental and analytic discussions of selfhood together, manages to bypass Kierkegaard. So the neglect of Kierkegaard has been, at least, scrupulously bipartisan.

What the present work aims to show is that Kierkegaard's distinctive and insightful discussions on the nature of the self *can* profitably be brought into dialogue with contemporary work on personal identity. In his 1968 book-length critique of Kierkegaard, K. E. Løgstrup speaks of Kierkegaard's 'polemic against every substantial interpretation of the self', which had exerted an important influence on continental philosophy and theology, and notes that 'there is also a polemic against the substantial interpretation of the self in Anglo-Saxon empiricist philosophy, in which this polemic has a long tradition. A confrontation is thus in order.'<sup>68</sup> Løgstrup then offers a short discussion of Kierkegaard and Bertrand Russell—the very archetype, it must be admitted, of the analytic philosopher!—on the non-substantiality of the self. But sustained discussions of what Kierkegaard can contribute to contemporary views of the self did not start to appear until the mid 1990s, and then largely with reference to practical and narrative conceptions of personal identity. What this book seeks to do is to broaden the scope of engagement from the narrative self-constitution debate to wider questions about metaphysical persistence, psychological continuity, and posthumous survival.

The motivation for this dialogue is twofold. Firstly, we can gain a fuller understanding of Kierkegaard's conception of selfhood by considering how it stands in relation to the main currents of contemporary personal identity theory. As noted above, there are several respects in which Kierkegaard seems to have a great deal in common with both neo-Lockean metaphysical approaches to personal identity and practical, ethical understandings of the self. This suggests that a deeper and richer understanding of Kierkegaard's picture of the self can be opened up by exploring these similarities, as well as the key differences. The contemporary context provides several different ways of thinking about the self, and we can use these to help us discern what *sort* of self-theorist Kierkegaard is, what features he shares with contemporary thinkers, what sort of objections his account might thereby be subject to, and whether his work contains resources for meeting them. By placing Kierkegaard's thought against a different background, we can see its shape in a way we haven't seen it before.

On the other hand, we can also determine whether Kierkegaard also has a contribution to make to these debates. Kierkegaard's corpus provides a rich repository of philosophically structured psychological observation—a resource that contemporary philosophy has yet to fully exploit. One of the tasks of the present work is to unpack some of the key concepts in Kierkegaard and show that they can, indeed, be useful inputs into current debates on the reflexivity of memory, the

<sup>68</sup> Løgstrup 2005, p.164.

nature of diachronic self-experience, the relationship between psychological continuity and identity, and the interrelation of the core and narrative selves. Kierkegaard is thereby brought into focus not simply as a figure of historical interest, but as a thinker with something to offer live debates. And in this regard his disagreements with the major figures in those debates are, once again, as instructive as his similarities. We can use Kierkegaardian themes and concepts to assemble some new answers to questions that have perplexed modern-day philosophy—but the answers that he offers may push personal identity theory in some unfamiliar, and perhaps uncomfortable, directions.

Nonetheless, despite its potential contribution to both Kierkegaard Studies *and* personal identity theory, this dialogue between Kierkegaard and living philosophers may be resisted from several perspectives. Some may find the whole thing hopelessly anachronistic: why would a nineteenth century Danish philosopher–theologian have anything to say to living, analytic philosophers such as Derek Parfit, Galen Strawson, Marya Schechtman, and J. David Velleman? The only real way to answer this objection is to simply go ahead and show that Kierkegaard *does* have something to say; but it is important to be clear at the outset about what my project does and does not claim. It does claim that Kierkegaard’s work contains philosophical resources which *we* can use in trying to answer some of the questions these living philosophers have raised. It does *not* claim—implicitly or otherwise—that Kierkegaard himself is concerned with the *same* questions. I do not suggest that Kierkegaard was somehow prescient enough to foresee problems that would not be raised for another century or more. But insofar as he is a philosopher concerned with the nature of selfhood, we shouldn’t be surprised to see him respond to similar features of our experience of the self, such as the reflexivity of memory and the experience of alienation from our past and future, as modern writers do.

Analytic philosophers of the self may also find Kierkegaard simply doesn’t pass muster as a worthy interlocutor: they may find his writings too unsystematic, his concepts too imprecise, his religious commitments too intrusive and controversial. Again, some of this can only be dealt with by doing the work to demonstrate his usefulness. However, it’s worth acknowledging that much of what Kierkegaard has to say might indeed be indigestible to at least some analytic philosophers. The analytic reader may look askance at some of the things they encounter in this book, such as the notion of figures of speech that are less than literally true but more than merely metaphorical, or the refusal to collapse phenomenal and metaphysical identity-claims into one ontological register of ‘real’ identity. Indeed anyone committed to a metaphysical conception of selfhood that can be disentangled from the *phenomenology* of self will likely be left cold by what Kierkegaard has to say. Likewise, philosophers who want to insist that a morally neutral base of facts about persons must be conceptually prior to the moral features of selfhood will also find key assumptions of the Kierkegaardian project unacceptable. And as we will see, Kierkegaard’s understanding of identity involves a normativity that has its roots firmly in

his soteriological commitments, which may rule the Kierkegaardian approach out-of-court for many philosophers.

I think that at least some of what Kierkegaard says can survive these objections; for instance, I think it's possible to entertain the idea of a soteriological understanding of human life without being committed to any sort of theism, let alone Kierkegaard's Christianity. The idea of omnipresent concern for the *final* status of one's life, for instance, can survive the thought that there will be no actual accounting for that status, for as is implicit in several religions' accounts of final judgement, the soteriological status of the deceased exists independently of any external judge (more on this in Chapter 9). But where we depart from Kierkegaard's core assumptions in order to make his thought more widely acceptable we need to be clear that we are doing so; and not everyone would agree that this can, or should, be done.

This brings me to some of the most strident objections that might be offered to the methodology of this book—by Kierkegaardians themselves. Within Kierkegaard Studies, the question of whether Kierkegaard can be read as a philosopher, or even as someone with a contribution to make to contemporary philosophy, has been surprisingly controversial. Some regard Kierkegaard as a philosopher whose work intersects in valuable ways with ongoing debates in ethics and moral psychology,<sup>69</sup> while others insist Kierkegaard can *only* coherently be read as a theologian concerned with issues specific to his intellectual context.<sup>70</sup>

Consider the methodological disagreements between the contributors to the *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard* collection edited by Edward Mooney. On the one hand, Rick Anthony Furtak declares that Kierkegaard's writings both 'address some of the central problems of philosophy' and 'challenge us to reevaluate our standard ways of approaching these problems'. He goes on to note that 'If contemporary philosophers hesitate to view Kierkegaard's work as pertinent to their concerns, this is just another sign that the discipline of philosophy, as it currently exists, is in need of a Kierkegaardian thickening if it is to survive in a form that is worthy of its own name.'<sup>71</sup> Marilyn Piety takes issue with Louis Mackey's claim that Kierkegaard's literary mode of production is incompatible with his being a philosopher<sup>72</sup> by noting—quite rightly—that 'If Kierkegaard's style is too "literary," however, to satisfy the conceptual rigor required of philosophy, then there are a host of other thinkers whose names should also be stricken from the philosophical rolls.'<sup>73</sup> (Piety doesn't name names here, but Nietzsche springs to mind). George Pattison, on the other hand, warns that while there are 'things that look like fragments of philosophy in Kierkegaard, things like contributions to long-standing debates in the philosophy of religion, in epistemology, in logic, maybe even an attempt at a kind of

<sup>69</sup> In addition to Davenport and Rudd, who will be discussed extensively in later chapters, see also Mooney 1996; Furtak 2005; Stokes 2010a; Lippitt 2013.

<sup>70</sup> Such as Turnbull 2007, 2011.

<sup>71</sup> Furtak 2008, p.59.

<sup>72</sup> Mackey 1971.

<sup>73</sup> Piety 2008, p.163.

proto-phenomenology', Kierkegaard's faith-based authorship imposes 'a clear limit to the extent to which Kierkegaard as a whole can be read as a philosopher'.<sup>74</sup>

Pattison echoes here a long-standing suspicion among Kierkegaard commentators that purely philosophical readings of Kierkegaard will somehow de-theologize him. This wariness is understandable: mid-twentieth-century discussions of Kierkegaard tended to read him through the prism of atheist existentialism, simply pushing Kierkegaard's religious commitments to one side in their appropriations of themes such as freedom, anxiety, and despair. Gordon Marino has argued that even today, 'among Kierkegaard scholars, many of whom are quietly offended by Kierkegaard's Christianity, there is an ongoing question as to how to remove the gem of wisdom from the gangue of Kierkegaard's pietistic faith'.<sup>75</sup> The readings of Kierkegaard that Pattison and Marino complain about can indeed do a particularly severe sort of exegetical violence to Kierkegaard.

Alastair Hannay warns that 'It is all too easy to place Kierkegaard's works in debates where it is far from obvious that they belong. Or if they do, then to place them there is to have them take part in disputes of a kind in which Kierkegaard would not feel at home.'<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, I think we can indeed mine Kierkegaard for useful philosophical insights that may have applications in contexts very alien to his own. This is, it seems to me, essential work if Kierkegaard is to be regarded as a thinker of ongoing philosophical value rather than a merely historical figure, a sort of dimly remembered eccentric uncle of Heidegger, whose work can safely be ignored by those disinclined to deal with it. So there is a difficult balancing act to be performed: extracting philosophically useful resources from Kierkegaard without distorting his thought in the process. In order to do so we need to be both scrupulous in our exegesis and cautious about distinguishing between what counts as an interpretation of Kierkegaard and what counts as an application of Kierkegaardian concepts. In what follows, part of my task will be to show that Kierkegaard's work contains descriptions of reflexive psychological states that, when introduced into contemporary discussions, can play a surprisingly useful role. The answers they provide to philosophical questions might be open to objections, and not every philosopher might find them credible (much will turn simply on how convincing we find Kierkegaard's phenomenologies of memory and imagination). But they are nonetheless answers worthy of our attention.

However, Kierkegaard does not simply offer us resources for developing existing approaches to personal identity. Rather, the distinctive temporality of the self which he outlines—which I'll argue maps onto important distinctions within the contemporary literature—suggests that there is something amiss with the entire project of trying to find persistence conditions for the self across time. To determine what counts as an entity's persisting between two points of time is implicitly to take an

<sup>74</sup> Pattison 2008, p.155.

<sup>75</sup> Marino 2008, p.126.

<sup>76</sup> Hannay 2008, p.241.

external and atemporal perspective on that entity. Yet the irreducibly *present-tense* and *first-personal* character of Kierkegaardian selfhood, as we'll see, suggests that we cannot regard selves in this way without missing the point about selfhood. If that claim is accepted, then the impasse we discussed at the start of this introduction between rival post-Lockean theories of identity loses its teeth. In his warning about using Kierkegaard philosophically, Hannay goes on to claim that if we *do* decide to use Kierkegaard in this way, 'we should always be on the lookout in case what is essentially Kierkegaardian is the idea that we should not be bothered too much by discussions of this kind'.<sup>77</sup> As we'll see, Kierkegaard's most significant contribution to the project initiated by Locke might indeed turn out to be gesturing towards a way out of it.

## Outline

In Chapter 1 we begin, appropriately enough, at the beginning: Locke's identification of 'extension of consciousness' as constituting the extension of the self across time. Equating 'self' with 'consciousness' is already a move that has resonances with Kierkegaard, but Locke has traditionally been read as offering a metaphysical 'memory criterion' view of personal identity, such that to remember being some past self *is* to be numerically identical with that self. However, this misses the essential role that 'concernment' has in Locke's account. For Locke, identity-constituting (or tracking) extension of consciousness is not simply a matter of remembering the past, but of remembering it with a certain form of *concern*. This concern is, for Locke, ultimately a soteriological one, for, as some commentators have claimed, Locke is not so much offering a metaphysical account of identity as one that will be pragmatically adequate for beings concerned about their ultimate salvation. Here, Kierkegaard's distinction between memory (*hukommelsen*) and recollection (*erindringen*) equips us with a way of understanding what 'concernful' memory might mean for Locke—for Kierkegaardian recollection, like Lockean concernful remembering, is essentially concerned with soteriology.

In Chapter 2 we undertake an analysis of Kierkegaard's concept of 'contemporaneity' (*samtidighed*), which will be central to the Kierkegaardian engagement with contemporary discussions that follows. *Samtidighed* has typically been interpreted as a form of religious experience, a description of the epistemic state of the believer, or a practical orientation towards the imitation of Christ. Building on discussions of how one becomes 'contemporary' with the incarnation in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Practice in Christianity*, we will trace a different understanding of *samtidighed* running throughout Kierkegaard's works, one that uses the term to refer to a phenomenal property of direct experience which can be present or absent in episodic

<sup>77</sup> Hannay 2008, p.241.



memory or imagination—and which is irreducibly normative in character. We become contemporary with those past events which we contemplate insofar as we experience these events as making demands upon us.

With this understanding of contemporaneity in hand, we turn in Chapter 3 to important contemporary debates regarding the phenomenology of memory, anticipation, and imagination, and the way self-experiences figure in these. Philosophers such as Wollheim and Velleman have asked: what is it that connects the ‘notional subject’ of a remembered experience (the subject presented as having the remembered experience) with the ‘actual subject’ (the person having the memory)? Relatedly, what differentiates the experience of episodic memory from mere ‘imagined seeing’? In other words, what makes some forms of visualization reflexive and others not? Kierkegaard’s discussions of memory and imagination strongly suggest that he belongs to a tradition, exemplified by figures like Hazlitt and James, which sees self-reflexivity as given by a particular phenomenal property of memory (one that is lacking in other forms of visualization). Yet unlike these other proponents of this approach, Kierkegaard sees the phenomenal property that makes memory reflexive as fundamentally *normative* in character, and as something that needs to be achieved rather than simply given. We consider how the introduction of Kierkegaardian contemporaneity into these discussions might answer some of these puzzles about memory, as well as related problems regarding anticipation, and a perennial favourite of personal identity theorists: the ‘personal fission’ thought-experiment, in which a person splits in two like an amoeba.

In Chapter 4 we apply this account of contemporaneity to Galen Strawson’s prominent discussion of ‘episodic’ and ‘diachronic’ self-experience. Strawson has articulated a spectrum of ‘temporal temperaments’ among people, relating to how we experience our self, where ‘self’ is understood as the mental entity we experience ourselves as being right now. At one end of this spectrum are ‘diachronics’, who have a sense that the self they experience themselves as being right now existed in the past and will exist in the future. At the other end are ‘episodics’, including Strawson himself, who lack this sense of temporal extension. Episodics remember their pasts and anticipate their futures, but do so without any sense that the *self* that exists now was there in the past or will be there in the future. I argue, however, that Strawson does not offer a non-reductive account of what diachronic self-experience is like. Kierkegaardian contemporaneity offers precisely such an account—but one that, due to its radically normative nature, poses considerable challenges to Strawson’s defence of the episodic life. We will also consider Strawson’s recent replies to this Kierkegaardian response to his work.

Strawson operates with an important distinction, one that echoes through other discussions of personal identity as well as in the cognitive sciences: the split between our phenomenal sense of *self* and our reflective awareness of being a particular *person*. This distinction is central to the entire trajectory of this book. In Chapter 5, we consider the ways in which we sometimes become affectively alienated from the

past and future of the human beings we are, such that we no longer feel that *we* are that past or future person. Derek Parfit's example of a young socialist who is horrified at the thought of the crusty conservative he will one day become, and Marya Schechtman's example of the 'serious matron' who can no longer identify with the carefree 'party girl' she once was, provide rich examples of this phenomenon. Whereas Strawson denies the importance of unifying one's sense of self with our awareness of our extension as a psycho-physically constituted person, Schechtman argues that it is psychologically desirable that we affectively identify with as much of our past and future as possible. Once again, we'll see that Kierkegaard provides the affective connection that unites the perspectives of the self and the person. Moreover, the normative cast of Kierkegaardian self-experience unifies the subject across time in a particularly thoroughgoing way, overcoming the massive yet gradual changes in psychology that are a problem for many neo-Lockean accounts of selfhood.

Our discussion of contemporaneity as a phenomenal feature of memory and anticipation that unifies past and future selves with the experiencing subject might seem to licence the claim that Kierkegaard understands selfhood as a matter of *psychological continuity*—which would align him very strongly with contemporary neo-Lockean approaches to personal identity. The place where Kierkegaard seems to come closest to offering an overt metaphysics of selfhood is in *The Sickness Unto Death*, with its famous (and forbidding) ontology of the self as a cluster of oppositional psycho-physical elements that becomes a self by 'relating to itself'. Yet as we'll see in Chapter 6, while both Anti-Climacus and Judge William speak of the 'continuity' of the self, they also both subtly work *against* the idea that the constitution of selves can be understood in this way. Indeed, Anti-Climacus' descriptions of what it is to *lose* one's self throw the entire project of grounding diachronic identity in psychological continuity into doubt. By tracing the ways in which both Judge William and Anti-Climacus speak of 'eternity' in the context of the self, we can begin to see the ways in which Kierkegaard's soteriological understanding of temporality will draw the discussion of selfhood away from neo-Lockean metaphysics.

If Kierkegaard is not straightforwardly a psychological-continuity theorist, might he not be better situated within the ambits of the practical and narrative identity approaches discussed above? Indeed, the most important and influential discussion of Kierkegaardian selfhood to date—that offered by John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd, culminating in their two recent monographs—has seen Kierkegaard as offering a robustly narrative account of personal identity. We consider these accounts in Chapter 7, where we explore a distinction (cognate with the person/self distinction discussed in Chapter 5) that has recently been offered by phenomenologists and cognitive scientists alike between the 'narrative' and 'minimal' selves. By considering the ways in which Judge William and Anti-Climacus invoke a 'naked' self as an irreducible component of the phenomenology of selfhood, we can see that Kierkegaard's discussion is less about diachronic identity per se and more about the interaction between the present-tense self and the diachronically extended person.

Again, though, this ‘naked self’ is a creature of soteriology, a being that knows itself as more than its concretion and facticity but which is nonetheless responsible *for* this facticity. It does not simply live *in* time, but at the intersection of time and eternity. Hence selfhood, for Kierkegaard, is a question of how *this subject now* stands in relation to the *totality* of its earthly lifespan. What Kierkegaard offers us then is something that, in light of the minimal/narrative self distinction, narrativist accounts of personal identity (and indeed any personal identity theory that wants to take the first-person perspective seriously) will need to address: an account of how the present-tense self relates to its narrative, as both *what it is* and yet something it is *not reducible to*. But can Kierkegaard’s soteriological account really be a viable candidate for this role? Could the ‘naked self’, the subject that is separable from its concretion and concerned for its final eschatological status be a worthy object of our concern, or is it, as Mark Johnston has argued, a ‘busted’ entity of no real substance or significance? These questions will be considered in Chapter 8, in which we consider the phenomenology of the self-before-final-judgement offered in Kierkegaard’s discussion of ‘the eleventh hour’, the intersection of biological time and eternal judgement.

In Chapter 9, we will take stock of just where this discussion has left us. As I’ll suggest, Kierkegaard stands both as a corrective to purely metaphysical approaches to personal identity, and as a resource for exploring the ways in which our sense of ourselves as present-tense subjects interacts with our diachronic concretion. I’ll also consider three main lines of objection to the argument developed here, including the question of what can be salvaged from Kierkegaard’s soteriological account of selfhood for non-theistic believers. Perhaps we really do live, as Kierkegaard said, at the intersection of time and eternity, even if for many of us, ‘eternity’ means something different to what it means for Kierkegaard.

# 1

## Recollection and Memory

### Locke and Becoming ‘Self to Oneself’

The history of the problem of personal identity, right down to the present day, can in many ways be viewed as the story of metaphysics’ ongoing struggle to free itself from the assumption of an immaterial substance as the bearer of identity. For writers like Locke, standing at the inception of that history, this was a dangerous business. For all its considerable problems—perhaps most seriously the problem of how an immaterial substance could interact causally with the material world—the Cartesian ego had the considerable advantage of fitting with religious beliefs that seemed to require a non-material, immortal core of the self. It was inevitable, then, that Locke’s uncoupling of identity and substance would be controversial, even if Locke stopped short of denying the existence of immaterial souls (claiming merely that we could have no knowledge of them, and therefore no explanatory use for them). Yet as we’ll see, Locke’s concern is not counter-theological—quite the opposite in fact.

In this chapter I don’t offer anything like a comprehensive reading of Locke. Instead I will trace out some themes in Locke’s discussion of identity that connect in interesting ways with Kierkegaard’s account of self-experience: the role of concernment in consciousness and memory, the moral irreducibility of personhood, and the importance of soteriology to understanding what we really are.

### Locke’s Three Forms of Identity

In a signally important move, Locke distinguished the identity of the self or person from both the identity of the bodily organism (the ‘man’ in Locke’s terms; we might use ‘human animal’ today) and the identity of the thinking substance or soul. Locke posited three different types of identity: that of objects, that of organisms (including humans), and that of selves or persons, each with its own, very different, persistence conditions. Objects, for Locke, are essentially collections of specific particles of matter, which leads him to the rather counterintuitive result that a pile of sand is no longer the same pile if a single grain is removed or replaced.<sup>1</sup> An animal, by contrast, has its ontological essence in its status as a ‘living organized body’, and the

<sup>1</sup> Locke 1975, pp.329–30. For a critique of Locke’s metaphysics of objects, see Ayers 1991, pp.207–15.

persistence of its identity therefore depends upon the continuance of its organic function.<sup>2</sup> Unlike inanimate objects, which cease to exist with even the slightest change in their physical composition, the identity of an organism can persist through radical alterations in the particles that comprise the body. A tiny acorn can become a mighty oak, through massive changes in its composition (and therefore innumerable changes of object-identity) and yet still be the same organism.<sup>3</sup> So humans qua animals can remain the same organism despite developing from a foetus into a full-sized adult (and despite the body's continual turnover of cells, which Locke anticipates,<sup>4</sup> as well as organ transplants).

Yet for Locke, persons or selves have a third type of identity, one that is neither dependent upon nor reducible to object-identity or organism-identity. A person, understood as 'a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and place' has as its identity conditions *sameness of consciousness* across time: 'as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the Identity of that *Person*'.<sup>5</sup> So a 'man' or human animal will persist as long as its metabolism persists, but the *self* is something whose persistence depends upon the capacity of consciousness to be extended to past events. The effect of positing these separate identity conditions for humans and selves is not trivial: it calls into question the assumption that each human automatically has a one-to-one, isomorphic relationship to one person. It's entirely possible, for instance, for a human being to fail to be a 'thinking intelligent Being, that has Reason and Reflection' and to therefore fail to be a person—an observation that accords with the sense in which we might say that embryos or patients in permanent vegetative states are *human* but no longer *persons*. Equally, Locke explicitly raises the possibility of nonhuman persons: an intelligent parrot, such as the one in a report Locke relates, would count as a person but *not* a human.<sup>6</sup>

The claim that person-identity is dependent upon sameness or extension of consciousness (which, as we'll discuss below, is notoriously unclear) brings both reflexivity and the first-person perspective to the fore: 'it is by the Consciousness it has of its present Thoughts and Actions, that it is *Self* to it *Self* now, and so will be the

<sup>2</sup> Note that this means Monty Python got it right: if organic function is essential to the identity of the animal *qua* animal, then 'This is an ex-parrot' is more correct than 'This is a dead parrot'.

<sup>3</sup> Locke 1975, pp.330–3. It's only a slight exaggeration to say that animalists essentially agree with Locke about this, but disagree that the identity of persons is distinct from the identity of the animal. Rather, 'person' is a qualification of most human animals for most, but not all, of their lives. See e.g. Olson 1997, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Locke 1824, p.308.

<sup>5</sup> Locke 1975, p.335.

<sup>6</sup> Locke 1975, p.333. Locke relates (p.333–4) Sir William Temple's (1709, pp.49–50) charming—if somewhat dubious—description of an intelligent Brazilian parrot's meeting with John Maurice, Prince of Nassau-Siegen. Today this point might be more commonly made with regard to higher primates who can be taught to use language, although the remarkable linguistic and cognitive abilities apparently displayed by some parrots (cf. Pepperberg 2002) suggest some parrots might indeed count as nonhuman persons in the Lockean sense.

same *Self*, as far as the same Consciousness can extend to Actions past, or to come.<sup>7</sup> This phrase ‘self to itself’ already resonates with later descriptions of consciousness, such as ‘being for-itself’, as well as the picture offered by the Kierkegaardian pseudonym Anti-Climacus of the self as a set of elements that becomes a self in ‘relating to itself’. Indeed, the emphasis on consciousness also coheres strongly with Anti-Climacus’ claim that ‘In general, consciousness, self-consciousness, is decisive in relation to the self. The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self. A person who has no will at all is not a self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he has also’ (SUD, 29/SKS 11, 145).<sup>8</sup> So for Anti-Climacus, consciousness and selfhood are either coterminous, or consciousness is a necessary condition for selfhood—a claim that, at least superficially, sounds very much like Locke’s vesting of the identity of the self in the extension of consciousness. (On the other hand, Anti-Climacus’ scalar understanding of consciousness marks an important difference from Locke, who, as we’ll see, seems to develop an all-or-nothing account of identity that comes under challenge from several different directions.)

Moreover, both Locke and Kierkegaard treat consciousness as intimately related to *concern*. In the unfinished manuscript *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*, Kierkegaard equates consciousness with ‘interestedness’ (*interessethed*), a term that captures a sense of self-referentiality built into intentional consciousness, such that consciousness is always implicitly *for* the subject. Hence consciousness points back (non-thetically) to an interested subject.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, Kierkegaard speaks of *bekymring*, ‘concern’, as a feature of thought that (as I’ve argued elsewhere)<sup>10</sup> does much the same work in his *Upbuilding Discourses* as *interesse* does in *Johannes Climacus*.

For Locke, ‘concernment’ is also an essential index of selfhood that derives from the nature of consciousness: ‘*Self* is that conscious thinking thing . . . which is sensible or conscious of Pleasure and Pain, capable of Happiness or Misery, and so is concern’d for it *self*, as far as that consciousness extends.’<sup>11</sup> Indeed, at one point Locke makes an appeal to common experience of the self precisely in terms of concern: ‘This every intelligent Being, sensible of Happiness or Misery, must grant, that there is something that is *himself*, that he is concerned for, and would have happy.’<sup>12</sup> It is on the basis of ‘a concern for Happiness the unavoidable concomitant of consciousness’ that consciousness appropriates to itself past actions and becomes

<sup>7</sup> Locke 1975, p.336.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that in Kierkegaard’s most sustained discussion of consciousness, Johannes Climacus differentiates consciousness (*bevidstthed*) from mere sentence or experience (*Sandsning, Erfaring*) (JC 169/SKS 15, 56). On that basis Climacus makes the surprising claim that even human infants are not, strictly speaking, conscious (JC, 168/SKS 15, 54).

<sup>9</sup> I offer a much fuller treatment of this work’s discussion of consciousness in Stokes 2010a, pp.29–60.

<sup>10</sup> Stokes 2010a, pp.147–59.

<sup>11</sup> Locke 1975, p.341.

<sup>12</sup> Locke 1975, p.345.

‘concerned and accountable’ for them.<sup>13</sup> Yet in describing concern as an ‘unavoidable concomitant’ of consciousness Locke seems to resist simply equating consciousness with concern, thereby leaving a conceptual gap that Kierkegaard, it might seem, does not.<sup>14</sup> For Locke, the phrasing suggests, consciousness is always *accompanied* by concernment, but it is not the same thing *as* concernment.<sup>15</sup> Consciousness is identified fundamentally with feeling: the particles that make up our bodies are ‘vitaly united’ to a ‘thinking conscious self, so that we feel when they are touch’d, and are affected by, and conscious of good or harm that happens to them’.<sup>16</sup> Thus we ‘sympathize and [are] concerned’ for parts of our body because we are conscious of what happens to them,<sup>17</sup> and this makes even our little finger part of our *self* regarded as that entity for whose happiness we are concerned.<sup>18</sup> Yet while concern may be a ‘concomitant’ of consciousness, it is not coterminous *with* consciousness, and it may not be as ‘unavoidable’ as Locke thinks. As we’ll see, the conceptual gap between consciousness and concern opens up an important fissure in the experience of self, one that Locke did not anticipate but to which Kierkegaard, who makes interest/concern the *telos* of consciousness, offers an important solution.

## The Memory Criterion

Traditionally, personal identity has been understood as a form of *numerical* identity, a logical relationship which (unlike similarity) does not admit of degrees. An object cannot be partly identical with itself; either  $a = a$ , or  $a \neq a$ . The law of the excluded middle prohibits anything in between. It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that philosophers seriously began to question whether *personal* identity works in the same way: perhaps personal identity might simply be a matter of being more or less strongly connected to a past person.<sup>19</sup> Locke certainly doesn’t entertain the possibility of identity being scalar. For Locke, identity just extends as far

<sup>13</sup> Locke 1975, p.346.

<sup>14</sup> Importantly, for Climacus, we can be *disinterested*, which would suggest that Kierkegaardian interest, like Lockean concernment, can come apart from consciousness. However, for Climacus, interest is both a description of consciousness *and* the telos that consciousness is to attain, and this makes consciousness scalar: we are *more* conscious the more interested we are. A completely disinterested person—such as the abstracted speculative philosophers Climacus attacks in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*—might be sentient, on Kierkegaard’s line, but he would not be conscious. In any case, as Kierkegaard uses the term, *completely* disinterested individuals presumably never actually exist.

<sup>15</sup> I’m grateful to Galen Strawson for this observation. Ayers makes a somewhat similar point in defending a straightforward memory view of identity from more ethically focused readings of Locke (such as that advanced here): ‘It is memory in a straightforward sense which for Locke both ties past actions to the present and excites such moral concern as the acknowledgement of guilt. Consciousness is distinct from conscience, and prior to it’ (Ayers 1991, p.267). Note however that for Strawson, there are things we are *concerned in* that we may not actually be *conscious of*, and which on Strawson’s reading of Locke therefore fall outside the bounds of our *person*; the ‘field of concernment’ is wider than the ‘field of consciousness’ (Strawson 2011a, pp.24–9).

<sup>16</sup> Locke 1975, p.336.

<sup>17</sup> Locke 1975, p.337.

<sup>18</sup> Locke 1975, p.341.

<sup>19</sup> Parfit 1984, pp.219–43.

as consciousness can be extended, such that I am *as much* the same self (insofar as we can make sense of that expression at all, as for Locke there is no question of quantification here) now as the self that had the most temporally distant experiences to which I can extend my consciousness to: 'Consciousness, as far as it ever can be extended, should it be to Ages past, unites Existences and Actions, very remote in Time, into the same Person, as well as it does the Existence and Actions of the immediately preceding Moment.'<sup>20</sup> Yet what might 'extension of consciousness' actually mean here?

The traditional answer is that Locke here offers a 'memory criterion' theory of personal identity: personal identity holds across time by virtue of memory. At first blush, this seems to be the obvious way to interpret claims that the subject extends consciousness to past events by 'repeat[ing] the *Idea* of any past action with the same consciousness it had of it at first'.<sup>21</sup> Thus was born a pervasive reading according to which Locke offers a refreshingly novel but flawed picture of personal identity, whereby I am the same self as the selves who had the experiences I can remember. If that *is* what Locke is arguing, then his position is subject to a range of apparently fatal objections—as a number of eighteenth-century commentators were only too happy to point out.<sup>22</sup>

Not least among these is that, as Butler and Reid noted, memory taken as a criterion of identity appears to be circular, because the very concept 'memory' already assumes the co-identity of the subject of the original experience and the person remembering it. On this understanding of memory I can only *remember*, rather than *imagine*, things that happened to *me*, so to determine if I remember something I must have already assumed identity with the self that had the past experience.<sup>23</sup> (As we'll see in Chapter 3, this is in fact not the only way to differentiate memory from mere imagination). Accordingly, if memory is taken as *constitutive* of identity, then 'personal identity is confounded with the evidence which we have of our personal identity'.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, while Locke insists that temporal distance is no impediment to identity holding between the present self and past selves, the memory criterion, understood as a criterion of *numerical* identity, is susceptible to Reid's infamous transitivity objection. Reid presents us with three person-stages (as they would now be known) which, according to our pretheoretical assumptions, are person-stages of a single individual: a young boy who is thrashed for stealing fruit from an orchard; a gallant young soldier who captures a flag in battle; and an old man who has been promoted to the rank of General. The old General remembers capturing the flag in battle, and the young soldier remembers being thrashed for stealing fruit—but the old man no longer remembers the thrashing incident that occurred so many decades ago.

<sup>20</sup> Locke 1975, p.340.

<sup>21</sup> Locke 1975, p.336.

<sup>22</sup> Theil 2011 summarizes several such critiques.

<sup>23</sup> Shoemaker 1975, p.120; also Parfit 1984, pp.219–23.

<sup>24</sup> Reid 1790, p.398.



In such a case a strict memory criterion would have the logically intolerable consequence that  $x = y$ ,  $y = z$ , but  $z \neq x$ ; or as Reid puts it, 'a man may be, and at the same time not be, the person that did a particular action'.<sup>25</sup>

Attempts have been made to get around these problems and so rescue the memory criterion. The notion of 'quasi-memory' or 'q-memory' (a mental event that resembles a memory in all salient respects but does not involve any *prima facie* identity-claims in the way normal memories do) has been advanced as a means of circumventing the circularity problem,<sup>26</sup> while philosophers such as H. P. Grice tried to defeat the transitivity objection by recasting the memory criterion in terms of an interconnected chain of 'temporary total states', each state preserving some memories of the immediately preceding state<sup>27</sup> (thus the General can be the same person as the boy so long as he is linked by a chain of mental states containing overlapping memory-traces that ultimately leads back to the boy). But Reid and Butler offer another objection to Locke: we cannot make sense of the idea of a subject having the same consciousness of a past event *now* as she had of it at the time without using 'same' in the sense of qualitative similarity rather than numerical identity—and mere similarity doesn't seem to secure the sort of numerical identity apparently necessary to support most of our intuitions about why identity matters, such as survival.<sup>28</sup> This last objection would also seem to apply to other forms of psychological continuity which neo-Lockeans have cited as identity conditions for persons, suggesting that twentieth-century attempts to get around the transitivity and circularity problems still don't secure personal identity in any intuitively satisfactory sense. Perhaps the best we can say for Locke is what J. David Velleman suggests: Locke gives a correct account of how memory 'recruits past selves for me, by putting them within reach of subjectively reflexive thought' but then mistakes this for a *metaphysics* of personal identity.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, J. L. Mackie complained in the mid 1970s that what Locke offers is 'hardly a theory of personal identity at all, but might be better described as a theory of action appropriation'.<sup>30</sup>

Yet as Marya Schechtman notes, accusing Locke of equating sameness-of-consciousness with memory is too hasty. While it's clear Locke sees memory as centrally involved in identity-preserving extension of consciousness across time, it's notable that 'he *always* talks about extension of consciousness and *never* about memory connections'.<sup>31</sup> Rather, it is an *appropriation* of such memories, not a merely cognitive *having* of them, that is essential to the attainment of Lockean identity.<sup>32</sup> Such appropriation is, as we saw above, crucially linked to self-regarding concern, yet is not exactly the *same* as concernment. Locke is not wonderfully clear on this point,

<sup>25</sup> Reid 1790, p.397.

<sup>26</sup> On q-memory, see e.g. Shoemaker 1984, pp.19–45 and Parfit 1984, pp.220–6. For some critiques and defences of the notion of q-memory, see Hamilton 1995; Garrett 1996; Collins 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Grice 1975.

<sup>28</sup> Schechtman 1996, pp.53–4.

<sup>29</sup> Velleman 2006, p.193.

<sup>30</sup> Mackie 1976, p.183.

<sup>31</sup> Schechtman 1996, p.107; see also 2005, esp. p.12.

<sup>32</sup> Schechtman 1996 p.106; also 2006, pp.166–7.

but one way to make sense of this appropriative element, without either collapsing appropriation into concernment or ignoring appropriation altogether (as straightforward memory theories do), is to understand ‘extension of consciousness’ as *concernful remembering*. What this might mean—and this is, I admit, a somewhat speculative interpretation of Locke, one that builds over the lacunae in his account at least as much as it uses what Locke *did* say—is that memory is exercised in a particular way, whereby concern both directs the act of remembering thematically and suffuses it affectively. To remember concernfully is both to experience our memories as having a particular emotional cast to them, and to have *what* we remember determined by some prior set of concerns.

And while these concerns aim at the ‘happiness’ of a ‘Self... which is sensible or conscious of Pleasure and Pain’ and thus ‘capable of Happiness or Misery’, they are not merely hedonistic. ‘Self’ and ‘Person,’ which Locke tells us are co-referent terms (corresponding roughly to a first-person and third-person perspective on the same object, respectively), are fundamentally *ethical* concepts for Locke; person ‘is a Forensick Term appropriating Actions and their Merit’.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Locke’s entire discussion of personal identity has an ethical motivation that his critics generally failed to notice.<sup>34</sup> Even his cobbler/prince body-swap thought-experiment (Locke’s contribution to the stock of science fiction scenarios his followers are justly renowned for) moves quickly into issues of *accountability* for past actions as central to the assignation of identity.<sup>35</sup> There are even passages where Locke seems to suggest that it is not so much that moral responsibility rests upon identity, as that identity is *itself constituted* in the process of assuming moral responsibility.<sup>36</sup>

This Personality extends it *self* beyond present Existence to what is past, only by Consciousness, whereby it becomes concerned and accountable, owns and imputes to it *self* past Actions, just upon the same Ground, and for the same Reason that it does the present.<sup>37</sup>

In such passages, it looks as though Locke violates, as Carole Rovane puts it, the ‘general presumption that once we get the metaphysics of the person straight, we must then accept whatever ethical and moral consequences follow’.<sup>38</sup> It’s worth bearing in mind here Udo Theil’s warning that the more recent readings of Locke which, in reaction against the earlier purely cognitive readings, ‘have emphasized the practical aspect of Locke’s theory to such an extent that they ascribe to self-concern and related moral and legal notions even a certain priority over consciousness in the constitution of personal identity’ are in many ways as problematic as the extreme cognitivist reading they reacted against.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, if the account of concernful remembering that I have offered here is correct, then we can understand passages like

<sup>33</sup> Locke 1975, p.346. Strawson (2011a, p.22) gives a useful gloss on the term ‘Person’ in Locke as a ‘unit of accountability’.

<sup>34</sup> Allison 1966, p.43.

<sup>35</sup> Locke 1975, p.340.

<sup>36</sup> Rovane 1993, p.79.

<sup>37</sup> Locke 1975, p.346.

<sup>38</sup> Rovane 1993, p.81.

<sup>39</sup> Theil 2011, pp.127–8.

this one as claiming that ‘extension of consciousness’ is an active exercise of memory that proceeds from a fundamental concern for oneself (particularly for one’s moral imputability), rather than such concern responding to the deliverances of memory. So this reading replaces the straightforward memory-criterion interpretation of Locke, which holds that our egocentric concern arises *on the basis* of an identity that is constituted by memory, with an interpretation whereby memory is used in an active, complex mental operation that has as its goal the ultimate happiness (understood as a function of its moral status) of the self. By remembering past events in a certain *way* the subject appropriates those events to itself.<sup>40</sup>

## Metaphysics, Concern, and Theological Pragmatism

Of course, as a *metaphysical* account of identity this fares no better than the memory criterion. Moreover, if memories have to be concerned in order to be appropriated to the self, there arises the possibility that some exercises of memory are *not* concerned in this way; that is, that we might remember some events and fail to appropriate them, which would amount to claiming that some events are remembered but are not part of the person. As we’ll see more concretely in Chapter 5, this possibility of remembering without appropriating (or, if you prefer, unconcerned remembering), depends upon a fissure between cognitive *awareness* of identity and affective *identification* that Locke simply did not contemplate.<sup>41</sup>

But this failure to develop a viable metaphysics of identity may not be a problem for Locke, because Locke simply may not have been playing the same game as his successors. The received reading has Locke trying to give an account of the persistence conditions of selves—which he takes to be constituted by consciousness, and so which turns out to be a question about the diachronic continuity of experiencing subjects. However, Galen Strawson has recently argued that in fact, Locke simply takes the existence of continuing subjects of experience as a given, and then asks, first, what makes such a subject a *person* (which, to reiterate, here means ‘a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection’ and is a subject of moral imputability), and second, how we determine the identity of a given person, that is, what that person is ‘forensically’ responsible for and concerned in.<sup>42</sup> Locke, on Strawson’s reading, is doing something quite different from later neo-Lockeans, who take

<sup>40</sup> David P. Behan makes a similar claim insofar as he distinguishes *remembering* and *appropriating* in Locke, although it is not clear that Behan makes a strong distinction between ‘concerned consciousness’ and consciousness *per se* (this may be why he sees Locke as having failed to accommodate the possibility of ‘callous disavowal’ of our remembered actions, but doesn’t consider the possibility that we might also fail to appropriate them in a far more passive, less self-conscious way than overt repudiation). Behan 1979, pp.66, 74.

<sup>41</sup> In the other direction, Locke simply assumes, as Don Garrett (2003, p.104) notes, that ‘The appropriation of an earlier perception or action by the same consciousness in memory is psychologically sufficient for an irresistible conviction that one is the same person who perceived or performed it.’

<sup>42</sup> Strawson 2011a, p.11.

themselves to be developing and improving the Lockean approach: 'Locke's account of Personal identity begins where the neo-Lockean accounts of personal identity end. It begins with the assumption of what they seek to give an account of: a diachronically continuous subject of experience that qualifies as a Person,'<sup>43</sup> where 'person' is a term that picks out a locus of forensic responsibility.

What Locke is trying to do, on Strawson's reading, is to give an account of what any subject of experience (whatever its substantial realizer might turn out to be) is responsible for at any given time, which turns out to be a function of consciousness and concernment. A given subject of experience is responsible at time  $t_1$  for whatever past experiences and actions it is then concerned in. At time  $t_2$  the same subject may be concerned in a different set of actions and experiences—and will therefore be a different person in the moral sense at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  although remaining the same subject and the same human animal. If this result seems counterintuitive, it needs to be remembered here that 'person' is being used in a far more restrictive sense than neo-Lockeans use the term, one that is principally concerned with forensic responsibility at given points of time.

Or rather, as Joanna Forstrom claims, *one* given point in time: Judgement Day. Discussions of personal identity in the seventeenth and at least the first half of the eighteenth century largely revolved around questions of posthumous survival and the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection. For Forstrom, Locke's account of personal identity is a piece of metaphysics, but a metaphysics that is *only* concerned with the state of affairs on the Day of Judgement:

Locke uses the appropriation of memory to explain why responsibility accrues to a particular individual in the future, *specifically after death*. For Locke, an individual is responsible before God for what he or she can appropriate on the Day of Judgment. Before that time, the same man or thinking being might be different persons, that is, a consciousness connected to the same thinking thing in union with the same organized body might appropriate to itself different actions from the past.<sup>44</sup>

It's been replied that Forstrom's interpretation would leave Locke open to an objection that can be traced back to Leibniz:<sup>45</sup> presumably if God is going to restore our memories to us on the Day of Judgement<sup>46</sup> (rather than just letting us off the hook for things we've forgotten about), God must have some sort of objective criteria upon which to assign the 'right' memories to each subject. If, as Locke claims, the goodness of God won't allow such a 'fatal error'<sup>47</sup> as subjects remembering actions

<sup>43</sup> Strawson 2011a, p.23. <sup>44</sup> Forstrom 2010, p.122, my emphasis.

<sup>45</sup> This objection is raised against Forstrom by both Weinberg 2010 and Strickland 2011. On Leibniz' version, see Allison 1966. A version is also discussed by Winkler 1991, p.220, who notes antecedents in Anthony Flew and J. L. Mackie.

<sup>46</sup> As Theil (2011, p.255) notes, one of Locke's early critics, Thomas Beconsal, explicitly endorses this memory-restoration reading.

<sup>47</sup> Locke 1975, p.338; 'fatal', as various commentators note, here means 'connected to one's ultimate fate'.

performed by someone else on the Day of Judgement and so being unjustly punished for things they never did, then God must know who we ‘really’ are and what they ‘really’ did. That being the case, it’s *not* extension of consciousness that imputes actions to our persons, despite what Locke says, but some other set of criteria (possibly known only to God) that Locke doesn’t provide.

This objection, however, only has force insofar as Forstrom still thinks Locke is trying to give a correct metaphysical account of our true identity. But Locke’s project may be more modest in scope than this. Kenneth Winkler argues that Locke’s ‘allegiance to certain features of the lived or common-sense world’ makes him largely immune to worries about certain metaphysical questions, such as that of the relationship between persons and their substantial realizers (i.e. whether thinking is realized in material substances like brains or immaterial substances like souls).<sup>48</sup> Locke emerges from certain passages in the *Essay* as ‘a metaphysician of common life, or as an analyst of the lived world, a world bounded by our concern for happiness or misery’ who ‘seeks a human philosophy, a philosophy adjusted to us’.<sup>49</sup> Such adjustment entails a certain pragmatism. For instance, Locke insists that our certainty that we aren’t dreaming and that the objects of our sensory experience really do exist ‘is not only *as great* as our frame can attend to, but *as our condition needs*’.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, according to Winkler, the idea that personal identity depends upon consciousness may turn out to be false, in the way Leibniz’ objection suggests, and such a proposal admittedly ‘drives a wedge between the real self and the self I take myself to be’, but ‘the size and significance of the wedge depends upon the relationship between consciousness (or consciousness as we know it) and whatever it is (at the moment known only to God) that underlies it’.<sup>51</sup>

Raymond Martin and John Barresi take this realization to its logical conclusion: Locke’s discussion of identity isn’t terribly concerned with *ultimate* metaphysics at all, but with a metaphysics that’s good enough for practical purposes. Martin and Barresi call Locke’s approach ‘theological pragmatism’: his primary concern with identity is eschatological rather than metaphysical, and accordingly he offers an account of identity that’s the maximally reasonable account available to us here and now for the purposes of living with an eye to salvation. Whether it is the *true* view of identity is something we will have to wait until the Day of Judgement to find out; but whatever the true view of identity turns out to be, ‘we know it will be close enough to maximally reasonable views that our view will have been an adequate basis for conduct’.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, Locke subordinates metaphysical issues to soteriological ones even before the *Essay*. In a journal entry from February 1682 he claims that attempts to demonstrate the immortality of the soul from the putative indestructibility of immaterial

<sup>48</sup> Winkler 1991, p.217.

<sup>49</sup> Winkler 1991, p.219.

<sup>50</sup> Locke 1975, p.634; Winkler 1991, p.219.

<sup>51</sup> Winkler 1991, p.222.

<sup>52</sup> Martin and Barresi 2000, p.29.

objects all fail to secure the continued consciousness and memory that any meaningful conception of the afterlife would require; hence immortality is entirely dependent upon 'the will and good pleasure of the first author'.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, in a pre-*Essay* journal entry, Locke rejects the notion that identity could persist posthumously without memory, simply because this would yield no sort of eternal life we could care about:

If they say as some doe that the soule durement a sound quiet sleep perceives and thinkes but remembers it not, one may with as much certainty and evidence say that the beds post thinkes and perceives to all the while but remembers it not for I aske whether durement this profound sleepe the soule has any sense of happynesse or misery, and if the soule should continue in that state to eternity (with all that sense about it whereof it hath no consciousness noe memory) whether there could be any such distinct states of heaven or hell as we suppose to belong to soules after this life, and for which only we are concerned for and inquisitive after its immortality and to this end I leave every man to answer to his owne self, viz if he should continue to eternity in the same sound sleepe he has sometimes been in whether he would be ever a jot more happy or miserable durement that eternity then the bedstead he lay on.<sup>54</sup>

Even at this early stage, it seems an account of personal identity that can only yield an afterlife we cannot extend our concern to is *just thereby* to be rejected. Here, at least, the soteriological tail is wagging the metaphysical dog. A philosophy 'adjusted to us' must be adjusted to our hopes regarding happiness and misery, including—and for Locke, principally—our ultimate, 'fatal' hopes.

Hence when Locke comes up against problems of moral imputability thrown up by states like somnambulism and drunkenness, he is content to say that while *human* law is right to punish those who plead that they do not remember their misdeeds (because, quite simply, they might be lying), 'in the great Day, wherein the Secrets of all Hearts shall be laid open, it may be reasonable to think, no one shall be made to answer for what he knows nothing of; but shall receive his Doom, his Conscience accusing or excusing him'.<sup>55</sup> That looks suspiciously like a cheat, an ad hoc appeal to the goodness of God used to buy himself out of a philosophical difficulty on the cheap. Moreover, as we saw above, taken on its own it leaves open the prospect that sinners will not be punished for the sins they've simply *forgotten*, a prospect William James claims Locke's critics regarded as 'scandalous'<sup>56</sup> and which Locke does not clear up in his replies to accusations by Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester, that Locke's theory was incompatible with the doctrine of resurrection.<sup>57</sup>

Locke eventually came to accept that such problems were trickier than he had first allowed. For instance, in correspondence with Molyneux, he had to concede that the drunk is responsible for his actions (and thereby liable for punishment) in a way the sleepwalker is not, even though both are equally unable to extend consciousness to

<sup>53</sup> Ayers 1991, pp.254–5; the journal quote is reprinted in Locke 1936, p.123.

<sup>54</sup> King 1884, p.129; cf. Forstrom 2010, p.13.

<sup>55</sup> Locke 1975, p.344.

<sup>56</sup> James 1950, p.349.

<sup>57</sup> For Locke's correspondence with Stillingfleet, see Locke 1824.

their misdeeds.<sup>58</sup> Yet such problems largely dissolve if Martin and Barresi's theological pragmatist reading is correct, and Locke is simply trying to outline the best account of identity available to us here and now, not *the* definitive, God's-eye account of what we are, which will only be available to us post-mortem.<sup>59</sup> Locke's discussion of identity is, in Udo Theil's terms, 'essentially a subjectivist treatment of the issue where our own concepts are crucial rather than the things themselves'.<sup>60</sup> From that perspective, memory matters not because it defines the boundaries of the self in an ultimate sense, but because it is centrally involved in the ways in which we appropriate what *appears to us* to be included within ourselves. So when Locke declares that if I remember seeing Noah's flood then I *am* the same self as the self that saw the flood,<sup>61</sup> this is not a rather outlandish metaphysical statement (one that looks like a *reductio* of Locke's own position), but a declaration of how identity appears *from the inside*, for living, morally engaged beings such as us. At the risk of using a rather dangerous word here, Locke is at least in part developing a *phenomenology* of personal identity rather than a metaphysics. Locke's question, as commentators such as David P. Behan have argued, seems to have been misinterpreted: 'Locke's problem of personal identity was not a third-person problem of finding a relation—memory—which would unite perceptions into a spiritual bundle but was rather a first-person problem of how a moral man is self to *himself* over time.'<sup>62</sup> And central to that process is what Strawson terms a subject's 'field of morally-affectively-concerned-from-the-inside givenness'<sup>63</sup>—a description that, as we'll now see, connects with Kierkegaard in interesting and suggestive ways.

## Memory vs Recollection in Kierkegaard

My reading of Locke as endorsing 'concernful remembering' as appropriating past events, or 'extending consciousness' to the past, involves a distinction between memory per se, and an appropriative *way* of remembering. To apprehend a past event in a way that counts as self-constituting (on a phenomenal if not metaphysical level) is not simply to remember it, but to remember it in some appropriative or self-concerned mode. There are of course many different types of memory, as captured in contemporary psychology's taxonomies of declarative (episodic and semantic) and procedural memory. But Kierkegaard offers a distinction between memory (*hukommelsen*) and recollection (*erindringen*) that is remarkably useful in terms of trying to flesh out this concept of concernful remembering.

<sup>58</sup> Allison 1966, p.47. Helm 1981 disputes this, arguing that Locke didn't, in fact, concede.

<sup>59</sup> See also Theil 2011, p.133: 'It is important to note that Locke's reference to the Last Judgement is an essential element of his theory: only by relating the question of moral responsibility and reward or punishment to the Last Judgement can he avoid all those problems which would arise from his position that consciousness-based personal identity alone is the foundation of just reward and punishment.'

<sup>60</sup> Theil 2011, p.102.

<sup>61</sup> Locke 1975, p.341.

<sup>62</sup> Behan 1979, p.55.

<sup>63</sup> Strawson 2011a, p.51.

In *Stages on Life's Way*, the pseudonym William Afham differentiates between the verbs 'to remember' (*at huske*) and 'to recollect' (*at erindre*)—a distinction that echoes both Plato and Aristotle.<sup>64</sup> Memory, in Afham's picture, is essentially a mere deliverer of information, an 'indiscriminate' faculty that provides 'a mass of details' (SLW, 14/SKS 6, 21) which do not necessarily have any inherent meaning or interconnection. (As an extreme example, think of Borges' short story 'Funes the Memorious', about a man who, following a head injury, perceives and remembers everything in phenomenal detail but at the cost of being unable to *think* anything.)<sup>65</sup> In that regard Afham seems to regard remembering as a relatively passive process. That has something right about it—certainly memories suddenly can, and frequently do, pop into our head for no apparent reason and apropos of nothing in particular, in a way that seems independent of our agency.<sup>66</sup> The famous scene where Proust's narrator bites into a madeleine cake and is flooded with involuntary memory bears quoting at length here:

At the very instant when the mouthful of tea mixed with cake-crumbs touched my palate, I quivered, attentive to the extraordinary thing that was happening in me. . . . Undoubtedly what is fluttering this way deep inside me must be the image, the visual memory which is attached to this taste and is trying to follow it to me. . . . And suddenly the memory appeared. That taste was the taste of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because that day I did not go out before it was time for Mass), when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my Aunt Léonie would give me after dipping it in her infusion of tea or lime-blossom. . . . all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's park, and the water-lilies on the Vivonne, and the good people of the village and their little dwellings and the church and all of Combray and its surroundings, all of this which is assuming form and substance, emerged, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea.<sup>67</sup>

Not all involuntary memory is this detailed or vivid of course, but the passivity of the experience is familiar enough. Moreover, some of our non-technical English terms for memory seem more active than others: 'I remember' or 'I'm reminded of' seem more like reports of something happening *to* the subject while 'reminisce' or 'call to mind' seem to refer more to willed actions. Arguably, at least, 'I recollect' belongs more to the active set of verbs (and it's interesting in this context—though of course far from conclusive—that Afham does not use another memory term that Kierkegaard sometimes uses, *mindes*, which can only be used in the passive voice).

<sup>64</sup> See SLW, 676 and SKS K6, 96.

<sup>65</sup> 'With no effort, he had learned English, French, Portuguese, and Latin. I suspect, however, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions. In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details, almost immediate in their presence' (Borges 2000, p.94).

<sup>66</sup> On whether unbidden thoughts (including spontaneous memories) lack a sense of agency, see Gallagher 2005, p.181 and de Haan and de Bruin 2010.

<sup>67</sup> Proust 2003, pp.47–50.



However, for Afham the difference between memory and recollection is not *simply* that the former is involuntary and the latter is voluntary—for in fact, according to Afham, memory can be used, more or less deliberately, to *prevent* recollection:

When memory is refreshed again and again, it enriches the soul with a mass of details that distract recollection. Thus repentance is a recollection of guilt. From a purely psychological point of view, I really believe that the police aid the criminal in not coming to repent. By continually recounting and repeating his life experiences, the criminal becomes such a memory expert at rattling off his life that the ideality of recollection is driven away. (SLW, 14/SKS 6, 21)<sup>68</sup>

So recollection and memory are two separate (if related) processes, both of which can be willed, and one of which can be pursued to the detriment of the other. Yet memory is ‘immediate and is assisted immediately’ while recollection can only be assisted ‘reflectively’ (SLW, 12/SKS 6, 20). Memory thus is more of an immediate response to a stimulus, which can be aided in non-reflective ways: if you’re trying to remember the name of the 39th president of the United States, and I say ‘Here’s a clue: rhymes with “garter,”’ the words ‘Jimmy Carter’ will spring into your head more or less spontaneously.<sup>69</sup> Recollection, on the other hand, can only be assisted by some sort of *reflective* process (which, it should be noted, doesn’t rule out the occurrence of *unprompted*, unassisted recollection). This reflective aspect to recollection maps onto the first-order/second-order conceptual relationship that Afham posits between memory and recollection: ‘Remembering,’ he tells us, ‘is only a vanishing condition. Through memory, the experience presents itself to receive the consecration of recollection’ (SLW, 9/SKS 6 17–18).

Memory, for Afham, provides raw material for recollection; the ‘mass of details’ it brings forth into consciousness is somehow synthesized or arranged by recollection in a way that gives it an ‘ideality’—and by virtue of this ideal goal, this synthetic process is ‘strenuous and conscientious in a way completely different from indiscriminate memory’ (SLW, 10/SKS 6, 18). Whereas memory has no internal principle directing or organizing its reproduction of details (beyond whatever might be found in an associationist psychology such as Hume’s), recollection organizes these details in light of some higher principle of schematization. A useful analogy here (and anticipating some of what we’ll discuss in Chapter 7) is that of writing a biography: the biographer sifts through a mass of details and determines which are relevant and how they are to be presented. Both the selection and the arrangement happen

<sup>68</sup> Judge William makes a related statement later in *Stages on Life’s Way*: ‘there are cases of a man’s becoming absent-minded because he has too much memory’ (SLW, 120/SKS 6, 113).

<sup>69</sup> It may be that not all mnemonics work in such a clearly non-reflective and spontaneous way. When a beginner guitar student can’t remember which note corresponds to a given string (in standard tuning) and rattles off the ‘Easter Bunny gets drunk at Easter’ mnemonic, they might need to perform some limited reflective process (‘the fifth string is the second-last string, the second-last word in the mnemonic was “at”, which begins with “a”, so the fifth string is tuned to “a”’).

according to some *logos* that the biography is meant to bring out: biographies are not simply chronicles but instead seek to bring out meanings inherent in (but only recoverable through the re-telling of) the raw material of a life. What we look to a biography to furnish us with is, at least typically, a fuller *understanding* of the subject, such that the details presented, and their mode of presentation, all contribute to giving us a better grasp of who the subject is in the richest sense. Even Proust's narrator, once the taste of the madeleine has caused his spontaneous memory rush of seemingly random details, still has to *narrate* his experiences, in a way that brings out their essential meaning for him and his life. So when Afham tells us that many memoirs have no doubt been written that are products of memory but contain no recollection (SLW, 11/SKS 6, 19), and that these recollection-less memoirs would be like 'a notebook in which one scribbles anything that comes to mind' (SLW, 11/SKS 6, 19), we understand what would be defective about them, and by extension, what 'the consecration of recollection' adds to memory. A mere chronicle of the 'chatter' of events that lacks a coordinating reference to the *person* as its internal telos would make a very poor biography—and, according to Afham, the same applies to *auto*-biography and to autobiographical recollection.

Elsewhere Kierkegaard reiterates that recollection's synthesis of the raw material provided by memory also performs this editorial function of cutting out inessential details to allow the essential meanings of others to emerge. In a letter to Bishop Mynster in 1849, Kierkegaard speaks of 'the quiet of my mind where "recollection" completely hides all the particulars that "memory" now and then piece by piece has transmitted to it' (LD, 339–40/SKS 28, 361). And in his review of *Two Ages* he claims that when we recollect some event that has a personal significance for us we often forget many of the details (which is why—so he says—lovers often can't give a good description of what their beloved looks like in the early stages of their relationship); conversely, external details devoid of such significance that are remembered 'obtrusively make one unable to forget them because there is nothing to *recollect*' (TA, 36/SKS 8, 36). In *Stages on Life's Way* Afham distinguishes between what can and cannot be recollected in striking terms:

Only the essential can be recollected . . . The essential is conditioned not only by itself but also by its relation to the person concerned. The person who has broken with the idea cannot act essentially, can undertake nothing that is essential; the essential would then be to repent, which is only the new ideality. (SLW, 12/SKS 6, 19–20)

Recollection, in Robert E. Wood's phrase, 'ripens'<sup>70</sup> experience by bringing what is *essential* in the past into the present<sup>71</sup> (an understanding of recollection that, as David Kangas points out, appears to owe much to Hegel).<sup>72</sup> And what counts as essential determined by a recollected state of affairs' reflexive relationship to the person doing the recollecting, a relationship that is lacking in the case of mere

<sup>70</sup> Wood 2000, p.63.

<sup>71</sup> Wood 2000, p.66.

<sup>72</sup> Kangas 2007a, p.104.

memory. As Peter Goldie puts it (in an explicit appropriation of the memory/recollection distinction from *Stages on Life's Way*), 'an indifferent act of memory of an incident in one's past life is not sufficient for one to be able to recollect that incident, and thus to have a narrative sense of self in respect of it'.<sup>73</sup> The result is that while memory concerns mere facts, and so 'chatter[s] on and on in order to ape the chattering nature of life's content', recollection is concerned with a specific task: 'to maintain for a person the essential continuity of life and assure him that his earthly existence wants to remain *uno tenore* [uninterrupted], one breath, and expressible in one breath' (SLW, 10/SKS 6, 18). Recollection therefore differs from memory in that it reflexively (not necessarily reflectively i.e. as an object of thematized reflection—recall that Afham only says that recollection can only be *assisted* reflectively) refers back to the recollecting self. In so doing, it 'assures' the subject that his life has continuity—a claim that has a clear resonance with both Locke and neo-Lockean versions of the memory criterion. However, just as (if Strawson's reading is correct) Locke himself does not regard memory per se as constitutive of the continuing *subject of experience* (which he simply takes as given), Afham regards memory as *assuring* the subject of his uninterrupted life on earth. The charge that Locke confounded our evidence of the continuity of identity (memory) with what constitutes that identity would not hold against Afham's account of recollection, for Afham is not claiming that memory is the metaphysical ground of that continuity. What is at issue here is how a being of a particular type—a 'man' in Locke's parlance, a *menneske* or human being in Kierkegaard's—attains a type of morally qualified identity ('person' for Locke, 'self' for Kierkegaard) through appropriative consciousness. Memory is part of what constitutes the latter kind of identity, but the former is simply assumed as given.

But when discussing Kierkegaard, we must be careful to distinguish between Kierkegaard's own views and those of his pseudonyms, who are not mere mouth-pieces for Kierkegaard himself but spokesmen for a range of competing life-views. And in that context we need to bear in mind that Afham's account of memory is part of an 'aesthetic' understanding of the role memory plays in life. That understanding is also prosecuted by 'A', the young aesthete whose papers make up the first volume of *Either/Or*. For A, life is ultimately a flight from the boredom that threatens to engulf us at every moment. A is an aesthete, but he is no simple hedonist; rather he approaches experience in a fairly careful, calculated way, designed to find and exploit 'the interesting' (*det interessante*) in every encounter and event. A recommends a (relatively strenuous) system of 'crop rotation', in which the aesthete carefully arranges and apportions their pleasures in such a way as to avoid the sorts of commitment or stable continuity that might lead to boredom. The crop rotator doesn't just avoid the big commitments (marriage, career) but even the trivial

<sup>73</sup> Goldie 2003, pp.302–3. See also Goldie 2012, pp.54–5, 70.

commitment of watching a whole play or reading a whole book. He participates in life, but in an ironic way, such that his involvement can be rescinded at any moment—that is, at the first sign that things are becoming boring.

In this context, A recommends cultivating memory (and here he uses *at erindre* and *at huske* more or less interchangeably, without the distinction that Afham introduces) in such a way that the subject can remember or forget at will, as the fight against boredom might demand at a given moment. Forgetting is a way of shrugging off any involvement in life that might not be entirely on the aesthete's own terms. And such wilful forgetting requires keeping any essential meanings that what is remembered may have for us at arm's length:

But to forget is an art that must be practiced in advance. To be able to forget always depends upon how one remembers, but how one remembers depends upon how one experiences actuality. The person who runs aground with the speed of hope will recollect in such a way that he will be unable to forget. Thus *nil admirari* is the proper wisdom of life. No part of life ought to have such decisive meaning for a person that he cannot forget it any moment he wants to; on the other hand, every single part of life ought to have so much meaning for a person that he can remember it at any moment. (EO, 1:293/SKS 2, 282)

Of course it may be difficult simply to forget some past event that is redolent with uncomfortable meaning for the subject, but the aesthete has developed a strategy to overcome this too: to remember something *poetically* is, in effect, a form of forgetting, for 'When I remember poetically, my experience has already undergone the change of having lost everything painful' (EO, 1:293/SKS 2, 282). In the first section of A's papers, the 'Diapsalmata', A also claims that 'nothing is more dangerous than to recollect' insofar as an aesthete's poeticizing mode of recollection deprives all temporal relationships of their interest for the recollector—yet this also means that, for an aesthete, 'recollection is more richly satisfying than all actuality, and it has a security that no actuality possesses' (EO, 1:32/SKS 2, 41). At the other end of the same volume we encounter Johannes the Seducer, an aesthete whose powers of reflection have rendered his aesthetic enjoyment even more reified and recursive than those of the crop rotator. The Seducer also finds that recollection is a means 'not only of conserving but also of augmenting', giving a 'double effect' to the act of recollection such that it involves both the pleasure of the recollected event *and* the pleasure of recollection itself (EO, 1:343/SKS 2, 333). Like the crop rotator, the seducer strives to ensure that every event is lived through in such a way that it can be recollected afterwards in the maximally pleasing, maximally interesting way (EO, 1:390/SKS 2, 378).

But to experience the world in this way, in the state that George Connell has called 'anticipatory recollection',<sup>74</sup> is to live at one step removed from direct experience, to forsake the present in order to imaginatively adopt a future standpoint from which

<sup>74</sup> Connell 2006, p.427; see also Stokes 2010b.

what is now present can be recollected. For the aesthete, recollection is simply another technique for extracting pleasure from life while avoiding any sort of deeper commitment or ethical engagement with the world. No wonder then that in his admonitions to the young aesthete to change his ways, Judge William, Kierkegaard's spokesman for the 'ethical' sphere of existence, distinguishes between recollection 'in the sense in which you love it so much, this mixture of fiction and truth' and 'the earnest and faithful recollection of your conscience' (EO, 2:16/SKS 3, 25).

Afham, despite his talk of the essential self-reflexivity of recollection that distinguishes it from the distracting chatter of memory, is himself among Kierkegaard's aesthetic pseudonyms. He too wishes to elevate recollection to something like an aesthetic, escapist art, one that 'conjuges away the present' (SLW 13/SKS 6, 21). Yet in putting forward an understanding of recollection as linked to what is 'essential' in memory, he nonetheless points in the direction of a *normative* form of memory, one that is linked to the subjective apprehension of what we fundamentally are in our totality.

## Recollection and Soteriology

Afham considers recollection to be that which assures the recollector that his life is '*uno tenore*', all of one voice—and this continuity, according to Afham, is a condition for personal immortality:

The condition for man's immortality is that life is *uno tenore*. Strangely enough, Jacobi is the only one who, as far as I know, has commented on the terror in thinking oneself immortal... However, as soon as one confuses memory and recollection, the thought is not so terrible—in the first place because one is bold, manly and robust, and in the second place because one is not thinking the thought at all. (SLW, 10–11/SKS 6, 18–19)

As we've seen, what distinguishes memory from recollection is that recollection concerns itself with what is *essential*, and what is essential in the object of recollection, according to Afham, is constituted by its relation to the self as the subject of an *eternal* accounting: in the 'bookkeeping' of recollection, a person 'draws on the eternal' which 'regard[s] everyone as solvent' (SLW, 11/SKS 6, 19). When we *remember* an event, it stands in a merely accidental relation to the person remembering it, whereas when we *recollect* it we apprehend its import for our putative status as immortal beings. Indeed, to remember rather than recollect is to fail to think the thought of immortality—which can here only mean that we fail to connect what we remember to ourselves as immortal, and thereby (in the context of Kierkegaard's religious commitments at least) fail to consider its implications for final judgement. Recollection, even for the aesthete Afham, has an irreducibly soteriological dimension.

The link between memory/recollection and soteriology is, as we've seen above, an important topic in the Lockean context, for soteriology ultimately motivates Locke's

emphasis on extension-of-consciousness as the basis of identity. It's not that memory per se *constitutes* identity in a standard metaphysical sense, but that concerned remembering *tracks*—to a degree of accuracy that appears to be at least pragmatically acceptable—the identity of the self understood as the bearer of a certain soteriological status. And in the same way, Kierkegaard regards recollection rather than memory (or in looser terms, the *correct* use of memory) as referring back to the self qua soteriological subject.

While Kierkegaard's use of the verbs *at erindre* and *at huske* are not always so scrupulously distinguished as they are in *Stages on Life's Way*,<sup>75</sup> the notion of recollection as a privileged form of memory with an essentially soteriological meaning runs throughout Kierkegaard's writings. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* reiterates the distinction between memory and recollection; the former is concerned with inessential, accidental details, while the latter concerns the 'eternal recollection' of guilt and its relation to salvation:

Thus every conception of guilt is lower that does not through an eternal recollecting join guilt together with the relation to an eternal happiness but through memory joins it together with something lower, something comparative (his own accidentality or others'), and allows forgetfulness to come between the particularities of guilt. This makes life free and easy, as a child's life is, because a child has much memory (oriented outward) but no recollection, at most the inwardness of the moment. (CUP, 1:540/SKS 7, 491)

Johannes Climacus tells us that the object of the recollection of one's guilt is one's *total* guilt—the very status of *being guilty*, not guilty for this or that specific individual deed (CUP, 1:529/SKS 7, 480–1). As Andrew Burgess puts it, 'Directly before God there can be no quantitative judgment of "more or less sinful," or "more or less righteous," but only a qualitative judgment of total sinfulness and total righteousness'.<sup>76</sup> Yet for Climacus 'it is this totality of guilt that ultimately makes it possible for someone to be guilty or not-guilty in the particular'<sup>77</sup> because 'a totality-qualification is never produced numerically'; instead, 'The totality of guilt comes into existence for the individual by joining his guilt, be it just one, be it utterly trivial, together with the relation to an eternal happiness... The slightest guilt, even if the individual henceforth were an angel, when joined together with the relation to an eternal happiness is sufficient, because the joining together yields the qualitative category' (CUP, 1:529/SKS 7, 481). In other words, *everything* that is recollected, even our most morally praiseworthy actions, is recollected in the context of a concern for one's status as guilty *overall*. The self that is tracked in *all* moments of recollection is the subject of a

<sup>75</sup> Not all uses of *at erindre* relate to episodic memory either—see e.g. TDIO 71–3/SKS 5, 442–4 on the recollection of God.

<sup>76</sup> Burgess 1999, pp.49–50.

<sup>77</sup> As noted by Nordentoft 2008, p.170: 'The total guilt is not only a guilt for individual actions (although, be it noted, it is a guilt for this as well), but it is the precondition for such guilt in individual matters.'

final overall judgement, a judgement of a *totality*, in which a single unrepented guilt makes one guilty. Taking away this concern for the self as the subject of a *total* judgement leaves us with, at most, a mereological conception of guilt which ‘remains in childish categories that are on a level with the grades on a child’s report card, or it becomes civil self-defense’ (CUP, 1:533/SKS 7, 484).<sup>78</sup> The final comment there is one of Kierkegaard’s many comparisons between human and divine justice: ‘human justice sentences to life imprisonment only for the third offence, but eternity sentences forever the very first time’ (CUP, 1:533/SKS 7, 485). Locke too sets up such a contrast, comparing the imperfections of earthly justice, which sometimes punishes offenders in ignorance of their true consciousness (due to drunkenness, somnambulism, etc.) and justice *in foro divina* in which there will be no such imperfections and each of us ‘shall receive his Doom, his Conscience accusing or excusing him’<sup>79</sup> (as we’ll see in Chapter 5, for Kierkegaard, nothing resembles the eternal less than human forgetfulness (UDVS, 18/SKS 8, 133)).

The claim that only what is essential can be recollected also recurs elsewhere in Kierkegaard. In his final months, he even makes the far more strident stipulation that the only thing that can be recollected eternally—that is, in the context of final judgement—is that one has suffered for the truth (TM, 298–300/SKS 13, 357–9). And the claim that the distinction between memory and recollection distinguishes good memoirs from bad also holds in this soteriological context. A more fulsome memory might deliver a more detailed chronicle of events, but not necessarily a better memoir, for having a particularly good episodic memory does not necessarily make one any better at bringing out the essential meaning of the events. In a marginal note made in a draft for *Stages on Life’s Way*, Kierkegaard notes that this also applies ‘with respect to repentance or the actual recollection of guilt, which is very different from remembering it. The moment a sin is committed, a person remembers every detail, and yet it has a totally different meaning when many years later he recollects it and does not remember it nearly so well’ (SLW, 520–1/*Pap. V B 155 n.d.*, 1844). In other words, it’s not recall of the *details* of some past event that brings out what is essential in it, but its relevance for the recollector’s soteriological status. The concerned import of the event does not derive from the detail in which it is recalled but from its significance for the person recollecting insofar as they are concerned for their

<sup>78</sup> See also CUP, 1:536/ SKS 7, 487: ‘The guilt-consciousness is what is decisive, and one guilt joined together with the relation to an eternal happiness is sufficient, and yet it is true of guilt, more than of anything else, that it sows itself. But the total guilt is what is decisive; compared with it, making oneself guilty fourteen times is child’s play—this is also why childishness always keeps to the numerical. When, however, the consciousness of the new guilt is in turn referred to the absolute consciousness of guilt, the eternal recollecting of guilt is thereby preserved, in case the existing person should be on the point of forgetting.’ An interesting counterpoint to Climacus here is Gabrielle Taylor (1985, p.89): ‘A person is guilty if he has done something which constitutes breaking the law. His guilt is thus localized: given that he has at one time broken one law it does not follow that he has also broken others, or that he will go on breaking the law . . . Punishment is for what he has done and not for what he is.’

<sup>79</sup> Locke 1975, p.344.

salvation—and that significance might be available even where recall of the details is fairly hazy. That what I recollect features in the life for which I am finally answerable is enough to make it a legitimate object of concern.

This discussion of memory and identity has already moved us beyond the metaphysics of personal identity towards an account of what the putatively identity-tracking features of memory are like from the inside—in effect, towards a *phenomenology* of personal identity, one that, as I've intimated here, involves a robust soteriological normativity. On the reading gestured to here—and to reiterate I don't offer this as a piece of definitive Locke exegesis—Locke is not offering a straightforward metaphysics of psychological continuity via memory, but an account of how subjects appropriate past and future actions to their present moral status. For both Locke and Kierkegaard, the self that is constituted through this act of subjective appropriation is fundamentally soteriologically qualified; its concern is 'fatal', concerned with ultimate happiness (*salighed* for Kierkegaard, 'happiness' or 'blessedness') and misery.

Yet for Locke, this process seems to be more or less automatic: to remember a past person-stage concernfully *is* to be the same person as that stage. Kierkegaard, by contrast, offers us a more nuanced picture of memory, in which some forms of memory manage to be appropriative in this way and others do not. Memory provides a sort of perspectival access to past events, but it is in one's concernful relating of what one remembers to the thought of one's salvation, the 'consecration' of recollection, that the identity-tracking features of memory come into play. In this way, Kierkegaard seems to have something to offer to the Lockean account of selfhood, and arguably to the neo-Lockean version as well: a description of how and under what conditions extension of consciousness to the past and future makes a subject 'self to itself'. Kierkegaard, it seems, stands ready to deepen our understanding of what makes memory (and anticipation) reflexive. And this connects his work to a broader problem in the philosophy of memory and personal identity: what differentiates the experience of having an episodic memory from the experience of simply *imagining* some past event? This is a problem that has sparked considerable discussion; and, as we'll see, it's one to which Kierkegaard offers a distinctive—and uniquely challenging in its uncompromisingly normative character—answer. Before we can consider Kierkegaard's answer, however, we need to look in some depth at the phenomenal property of *contemporaneity* that is central to it.



## 2

# Contemporaneity

## Contemporaneity and Memory

As noted in Chapter 1, the aesthetes that we encounter in Kierkegaard's writings are often concerned with, and indeed deeply interested in, the aesthetic possibilities and limitations of memory and recollection. Among these aesthetes there is perhaps no greater connoisseur of recollection than Johannes the Seducer, a man who has expended considerable effort in developing a method for squeezing every last drop of pleasure from an event—by ensuring, through careful planning, that the recollection of the event itself will be as pleasurable as possible (EO, 1:390/SKS 2, 378). For Johannes, a properly planned aesthetic experience, such as a romantic or erotic encounter, is a gift that keeps on giving well after the event has occurred. Yet in his cold-blooded pursuit of the hapless Cordelia, even Johannes must concede that there are limits to what he can conjure up in, and out of, memory:

It would be of real interest to me if it were possible to reproduce very accurately the conversations I have with Cordelia. But I easily perceive that it is an impossibility, for even if I managed to recollect every single word exchanged between us, it nevertheless is out of the question to reproduce the element of contemporaneity, which actually is the nerve in conversation, the surprise in the outburst, the passionateness, which is the life principle in conversation. (EO, 1:399/SKS 2, 387)

Johannes seems to be a person with considerable powers of recall, and indeed his diary suggests he has an uncommon eye—and memory—for details. Yet the Seducer finds that even if he could 'replay' verbatim his conversations with Cordelia, his experience of recollection would nonetheless lack a key element that was present in the original experience. Something in direct experience is lacking in episodic memory. But what? Johannes' even-if clause seems to rule out a lot of the things we would normally associate with the notion of a deficient memory. Insofar as this element would be missing even if Johannes could remember every word spoken, it cannot be straightforwardly conceptual; it must, it seems, relate to a *how* of experience rather than a *what*, some phenomenal feature that captures something essential to the experience such that no recollection that leaves this element out can be regarded as an accurate representation of the event. Yet equally it can't simply be an *emotional* feature of the experience, as presumably Johannes can relive those too; compare the way actors sometimes use memories to produce certain emotions, or Richard

Wollheim's claim that the memory of accidentally driving into the German lines in 1944 generated in him the *same* sense of loss, terror, and resistance as the original event.<sup>1</sup> This emotional aspect of memory, which Wollheim calls the 'cogency' of a memory, should be well within Johannes' power to bring forth. Yet no matter how vividly, precisely and cogently he manages to relive the experience, he still finds *something* from the direct experience missing. There's something about *being there* that he just can't recreate after the fact<sup>2</sup>—a phenomenal property of the experience which he labels 'contemporaneity' (*samtidighed*).

*Samtidighed* (literally 'same-time-ness' and translatable as 'contemporaneity' or 'simultaneity' depending on context) is a term that recurs throughout Kierkegaard's signed and pseudonymous authorships with considerable persistence, right up until the final confrontation with 'Christendom' in 1855, when he declares contemporaneity to be 'the decisive point' and 'my life's thought'<sup>3</sup> (TM, 290/SKS 13, 348). It's a concept that found a degree of currency in the twentieth century, with Gadamer,<sup>4</sup> Bonhoeffer,<sup>5</sup> and (in a more critical vein) Guardini<sup>6</sup> deploying their own understandings of Kierkegaardian contemporaneity in new philosophical and theological contexts. Yet despite this—and in spite of Kierkegaard's exhortation to his reader to 'Pay sharp attention to this matter of contemporaneity!' (TM, 290/SKS 13, 347)—the critical literature on Kierkegaard has had relatively little to say about the topic until fairly recently.<sup>7</sup> To be fair, there are several reasons why this might be the case, such as the term's diffuse occurrence across various texts, and the difficulty of disentangling putatively philosophical uses of *samtidighed* from more prosaic ones.

It's also been objected that Kierkegaard gives no account of how such contemporaneity (in Kierkegaard's central case, a latter-day believer's contemporaneity with the Jesus of the New Testament narratives) is actually possible. Mark C. Taylor takes Kierkegaard to task for not providing an argument that 'establishes the possibility of "overleaping" the 1,800 years of Christian history' and for not appreciating the 'processive nature of historical development'<sup>8</sup> through which all such engagement with narratives about the past are mediated. On this account, Kierkegaard's strident rejection of the Hegelian picture of history as the systematic unfolding of the rational in time blinds him to the historically conditioned nature of our understanding. Taylor accuses Kierkegaard of failing to recognise that 'the

<sup>1</sup> Wollheim 1989, p.106.

<sup>2</sup> Even if others *can* recreate it—for as we'll see, the failure to become contemporary in this way is a function of Johannes' aesthetic life-view, not any limitation in the faculty of memory per se.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted—as Kierkegaard rather curiously goes out of his way to remind the reader—that the discourse on contemporaneity in Number 8 of *The Moment* was written two years earlier, in 1853.

<sup>4</sup> Gadamer 1975, pp.112–13.

<sup>5</sup> Bonhoeffer 1966, p.32. For a discussion of Bonhoeffer's treatment of this topic, see Jenson 2005, pp.143–60.

<sup>6</sup> Guardini 1965. For a discussion of Guardini's use of 'contemporaneity', see Šajda 2010.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the references discussed below, see also Rocca 2004; Welz 2007; Martens 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor 1975, p.358.

moment of the incarnation is *always* filtered to the believer through the intervening events of the historical process', a history that includes theological and philosophical developments that determine the shape and structure of the believer's understanding of the events of the scriptural narrative.<sup>9</sup> If contemporaneity is understood as a direct, historically unconditioned experience of the past, Kierkegaard's 'life's thought' suddenly looks decidedly shaky. If Kierkegaardian contemporaneity is defensible, it must therefore be shown in what contemporaneity consists and upon which features of Kierkegaard's account of experience it depends.

Analyses of what Kierkegaard means by contemporaneity have largely focussed on contemporaneity on the level concrete action (the level emphasized in Kierkegaard's late discussions). There are, as we'll see, important reasons for this. However, to show whether, and if so how, such a contemporaneity is actually possible for Kierkegaard, we need to explicate *samtidighed* on the phenomenal, experiential level, rather than solely considering it as an ethical imperative to undertake specific types of action. The operation of contemporaneity on *this* level, which is essentially the level on which Gadamer's later appropriation of the concept occurs, will be shown to have intriguing and surprising implications for our understanding of Kierkegaard's phenomenology of religious experience. And as we'll develop over the next three chapters, it also stands as an important resource for use in discussions of reflexivity and diachronic self-experience in personal identity theory.

## Contemporaneity and Vision

The most sustained, and manifestly philosophical, treatment of *samtidighed* in the Kierkegaardian corpus is to be found in *Philosophical Fragments*, written in the voice of the pseudonym Johannes Climacus. It is here, too, that we see the transition from the prosaic meaning of 'contemporaneity' to a more philosophically interesting sense that extends the concept beyond objective historical contemporaneity (i.e. co-location at a given point in time) to something altogether more novel. *Philosophical Fragments* is structured as an ostensibly hypothetical inquiry into whether 'a historical point of departure [can] be given for an eternal consciousness' (PF, 1/SKS 4, 213). The discussion turns to the unique epistemic problems posed by the paradoxical event of God appearing in time, and asks whether, in relation to an historical fact, a person temporally co-present with such an historical event enjoys any advantage over those temporally distant from the event. Such a person is a 'contemporary' of Jesus in the mundane sense—the sense in which Kierkegaard is a contemporary of the younger Meir Goldschmidt and the older Hans Christian Andersen. For the sake of clarity we will hereafter refer to this form of contemporaneity as 'temporal contemporaneity' or 'contemporaneity<sub>t</sub>' for short.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor 1975, p.358.

Climacus considers whether there is an epistemic advantage to being such a contemporary<sub>t</sub> follower by virtue of their immediate (by which he here essentially means sensory) access to the putatively historical events described in the New Testament. At first blush, we might think, the answer would have to be ‘yes.’ Climacus too acknowledges that ‘it seems natural to regard as blessed the contemporary generation that saw and heard’ Jesus (PF, 66/SKS 4, 267), and proceeds to cash out this supposed advantage in experiential terms. We are asked to imagine a fabulous royal wedding feast held in the far-distant past, where the heightened pleasure of every sense has been catered for. If all that we, in our historical era, have available to us is a sketchy record of the event, then we are entitled, ‘humanly speaking’, to ‘regard the contemporaries as fortunate—that is, those contemporaries who saw and heard and touched, for otherwise what is the good of being contemporary?’ (PF, 66/SKS 4, 268). The implication here is that imaginative recreation of historical events cannot adequately capture the magnificence of events in actuality; only direct experience can provide access to this dimension of an occurrence. This is, essentially, a claim about the limits of our imaginative faculties, a brute fact of human psychology.

However, the ‘magnificence’ specific to the figure of the god-in-time is not immediately perceptible. As the god<sup>10</sup> has appeared in human guise, with no objectively discernible traits of divinity (thus making the claim of his divinity an object of either offence or faith), this epistemic advantage to contemporaneity<sub>t</sub> does not hold. In a situation where the god cannot be recognized *directly*, ‘in regard to the birth of the god’ the contemporary<sub>t</sub> ‘will be in the very same situation as the follower at second hand’ (PF, 59/SKS 4, 261) insofar as the contemporary<sub>t</sub>’s relation to the fact of this birth remains one of the possession of ‘merely historical’ knowledge. This will hold for even the closest contemporary<sub>t</sub>—one who goes to enormous lengths to observe and document the god’s every move (PF, 59–60/SKS 4, 262) or even the woman who gives birth to the god (PF, 59/SKS 4, 261). When a contemporary<sub>t</sub> *does* come to apprehend the divinity of the god, however, this is not because they move from apprehending the historical fact before them to apprehending an eternal truth, such as when, in Climacus’ example, we move from a consideration of Spinoza as an historical person to a consideration of ‘Spinoza’, where we use the name as shorthand for a body of teaching with claimed universal applicability (PF, 62/SKS 4, 264). Rather, the object of the apprehension of the God-in-time is and remains a specific, concrete, historical person, for ‘The presence of the god in human form—indeed, in the lowly form of a servant—is precisely the teaching’ (PF, 55/SKS 4, 258). As John D. Glenn Jr notes, the god’s teaching is a sort of performative utterance, such that the god *enacts* by his presence the love he *speaks* of<sup>11</sup>—and accordingly, the message and the act of its delivery cannot be separated.

<sup>10</sup> Climacus consistently refers to *guden*, ‘the god’ rather than using *Gud* as a proper name here.

<sup>11</sup> Glenn 1994, p.238.

Strictly speaking, by this point in the text Climacus has now made his case against contemporaneity<sub>t</sub>. As the contemporary<sub>t</sub> enjoys no epistemic advantage with respect to one putative historical event, that is, the Incarnation, such a person's privileged status with respect to that event is fully revoked. Climacus could simply leave things where an 1845 Journal entry leaves them: 'Contemporaneity or noncontemporaneity makes no essential difference; a historical (and for the contemporary it certainly is the historical, that the god exists, that is, exists by having come into existence) point of departure for an eternal decision is and remains a leap' (*Pap.* IV B 35:30, *n.d.*, 1845). Yet instead, having apparently dismissed contemporaneity as a factor in the acquisition of faith, Climacus now inverts the dialectic by declaring a new sense of contemporaneity that is *essential* to faith. As Patrick Sheil puts it, Climacus here indulges in a 'Kierkegaardian ploy; he attracts our interest with what we think is important, questions that importance, but uses the word that is *left standing* as the name for something unexpected; perhaps the opposite of what we expected.'<sup>12</sup> Climacus asks, in the torturous language characteristic of a new concept emerging from an existing one:

But what does it mean to say that one can be contemporary without, however, being contemporary, consequently that one can be contemporary and yet, although using this advantage (in the sense of immediacy) be a noncontemporary—what else does this mean except that one simply cannot be immediately contemporary with a teacher and event of that sort, so that the real contemporary is not that by virtue of immediate contemporaneity but by virtue of something else. (PF, 67/SKS 4, 268)

Such a new form of contemporaneity does not depend upon direct sensory access—something of no avail in this situation anyway—and is therefore open to followers at *all* times, not merely the contemporary<sub>t</sub> (PF, 67/SKS 4, 268). The effect of introducing this new sense of contemporaneity is to dissolve the distinction between 'the contemporary follower' and 'the follower at second hand'; as Taylor puts it 'all persons are equidistant from the event [of the incarnation]; all are contemporaries of the God-Man'.<sup>13</sup> The merely accidental fact of the point in history at which such followers live has no bearing on their status as *contemporaries of Christ*.<sup>14</sup>

In what, phenomenologically speaking, does this contemporaneity consist? Climacus, like Kierkegaard generally, couches his description of the contemporary believer in language which emphasises the *visual* aspects of the experience of contemporaneity:

There is not and cannot be any question of a follower at second hand, for the believer (and only he, after all, is a follower) continually has the *autopsy* of faith [*Troens Autopsi*]; he does not see with the eyes of others and sees only the same as every believer sees—with the eyes of faith. (PF, 102/SKS 4, 299)

<sup>12</sup> Sheil 2010, p.9.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor 1975, p.303.

<sup>14</sup> With the obvious proviso that they must at least live at some point from roughly 30CE onwards.

'Autopsy' here is a striking expression, somewhat jarring to modern ears. In their translation, Howard and Edna Hong note that autopsy (from the Greek *autos* + *optos*) literally means 'the personal act of seeing' (PF, 296 n.39). Gregor Malantschuk too equates the 'autopsy of faith' with 'personal inspection' or 'witnessing' (*selvsyn*, literally 'self-seeing', a term Climacus curiously does not appear to use in this context).<sup>15</sup> The noncontemporary<sub>t</sub> is 'not an eyewitness (in the sense of immediacy)', but nonetheless he gets to 'see for himself' in that 'as a believer he is contemporary in the *autopsy* of faith' (PF, 70/SKS 4, 270). It is by means of this autopsy, this personal seeing, that 'every noncontemporary (in the sense of immediacy) is in turn a contemporary' (PF, 70/SKS 4, 271).

This visual language is rather surprising, if not bewildering, given that Climacus has been at such pains to deny the direct recognizability of the God-Man. Spirit, Kierkegaard tells us elsewhere, is precisely the invisible (UDVS, 192/SKS 8, 289), and the god cannot be recognized as such based on his appearance.<sup>16</sup> Climacus too avers that 'the god . . . cannot be envisioned' (PF, 63/SKS 4, 265), and hence attempts to artificially prolong contemporaneity<sub>t</sub> through 'immortalizing' the god in detailed portraits (again, note the specifically visual example offered here) will not thereby make those who look upon such portraits into followers (PF, 63/SKS 4, 265). This seems to cut off all forms of *visual* (or at least quasi-sensory) engagement with the historical god-in-time available to the latter follower, whether in the form of memories or merely imaginative representation. However, Climacus does actually allow for a genuinely contemporaneous imaginative experience of the god via memory—but, in an important sense, cut off from the usual grounds of veridicality of memory:

When the teacher is dead and departed from the follower, memory presumably will reproduce the form, but he does not believe because of that but because he received the condition from the teacher; therefore, in recollection's trustworthy picture, he again sees the god. (PF, 65/SKS 4, 267).

Note that here the resources of the immanently human faculty of memory are still in play, but because the follower has received the capacity to 'recognize' the god directly *from* the god, memory's normally incomplete authority is supplanted by a transcendent warrant to regard the imagined representation as being a truthful representation of the god. In a limited sense we are familiar with such external authorities underwriting our sense that we have remembered something correctly, as when physical evidence or the testimony of others backs up our memory claims. For the believer, though, the transcendent authority provided by 'the condition' provides a certainty which empirical evidence, as Climacus tells us in many places, can only ever

<sup>15</sup> Malantschuk 1993, p.138.

<sup>16</sup> See also UDVS, 317/SKS 8, 409: 'How nobly faithful is the courtier who follows an overthrown emperor into exile and, when his imperial majesty is dressed in rags, still addresses him with the same submissiveness and homage as he did once in the halls of the palace and says: Your Majesty—because he did not cringingly recognise the emperor by the purple and therefore can now nobly recognise him in rags.'

approximate. In fact it would not matter whether the follower's memory was inaccurate, or indeed was not a memory *at all*, but rather something like the 'quasi-memory' category we touched on in Chapter 1.

This is so because the god's appearance is essentially immaterial to his being the god (except insofar as his 'incognito', his unrecognizability, is essential to the believer's acceptance of him as God being made by virtue of faith). Hence while the appearance is important to the degree that it is 'what the follower has seen and touched with his hands', it is 'not of such importance that he would cease to be a believer' if he saw the god one day and failed to recognize him (PF, 65/SKS 4, 266). Yet significantly, the engagement with the god still occurs on the *visual* level, a mimetic recreation of the experience of being in the physical presence of the god. Here we have a description of an imaginative apprehension of the god, decidedly visual in character, but where what is essential to the experience is not contained on the level of representational content, but of the meaning that suffuses that content for the believer.

## Contemporaneity as Religious Experience?

Contemporaneity, then, on an experiential level, plays out as an experience of 'seeing-for-oneself', in a way that transcends the resources of immediate perception, yet nonetheless seems to be somehow perceptual in character. We become contemporary with an historical person via an apprehension of a specific kind, one that goes beyond our normal epistemological resources. At this point it seems germane to ask if this Climacan contemporaneity is some variety of religious experience. Certainly, Kierkegaard's use of contemporaneity throughout his authorship is explicitly Christian in character, seeking as it does to 'cut away the posthistorical' (*Pap.* VII<sup>2</sup> B 241:4), and 'exclude what has been called the later-historical' (CUP, 1:96/SKS 7, 95) in order to bring the modern believer into some sort of direct engagement with the Jesus depicted in the New Testament.

However, if we attempt to analyse contemporaneity-with-Christ on an experiential level, there would seem to be two possible interpretations: one which sees such contemporaneity as possible *only* with Christ, and one which sees contemporaneity as an experience at least theoretically possible with other intentional objects as well.<sup>17</sup> In other words, we have a dichotomy between a form of essentially religious experience and a form of experience that can be directed towards a religious object. The question becomes whether contemporaneity with an historical fact is an

<sup>17</sup> Stan 2014, p.61 notes that 'The generic context and theoretical substratum of contemporaneity is overwhelmingly Christological' but adds that this is not the only sense of *samtidighed* to be found in Kierkegaard's writings.

extramundane experience, or a specific type of experience that here happens to be directed towards an extramundane object.<sup>18</sup>

In his discussion of *Fragments*, C. Stephen Evans articulates something very close to the first view, that contemporaneity is a form of extramundane religious experience. Evans argues that ‘most Christians, at least of those who have made a conscious choice, do trace their conversion to something that could be described as an encounter with Jesus Christ’<sup>19</sup> and illustrates his point with the conversion narrative of Anthony Bloom. Bloom’s description of becoming aware, while reading the New Testament, of a presence on the other side of his desk, a presence he felt absolutely certain to be Jesus, clearly belongs to an order of anomalous experience utterly different to our usual cognitive engagement with the world. This leaves problematically open the question of whether such experiences have a merely physiological origin (‘presences’, after all, are associated with supposed hauntings and certain types of psychedelic drug, as well as religious experiences), but this need not detain us. Of more concern is that Climacus’ account doesn’t seem to contain any clear indication that the follower’s encounter with Jesus is an experience of this type. This could be a function of the ostensibly hypothetical character of the argument in *Philosophical Fragments*, but evidence from elsewhere in Kierkegaard’s writings suggests that the form of cognition needed to achieve contemporaneity doesn’t belong to such an anomalous register of human experience. For a noncontemporary, follower, such an encounter with Christ is mediated through the record of Scripture, and Kierkegaard’s detailed discussion in *For Self-Examination* of the appropriate mode of receiving Scripture, explicated through the metaphor of the ‘mirror of the Word’,<sup>20</sup> contains nothing corresponding to the sort of religious experience Bloom describes. Instead, Kierkegaard develops an account of a self-reflexive mode of vision in which one becomes ‘alone with’ Scripture (FSE, 31/SKS 13, 58) in which the reader understands Scripture as speaking to them directly.

Nonetheless, Evans does indirectly highlight an element of contemporaneity crucial to understanding the psychological dimensions of the experience: that of *co-presence* with a historical fact. This is attested to elsewhere in Kierkegaard’s writings on contemporaneity, specifically in Anti-Climacus’ discussion of the term in *Practice in Christianity*, where faith secures the presence of Jesus on earth with the believer:

No, his presence here on earth never becomes a thing of the past, thus does not become more and more distant—that is, if faith is at all to be found upon the earth; if not, well, in that very instant it is a very long time since he lived. (PC, 9/SKS 12, 17)

<sup>18</sup> Michelle Kosch’s discussion of revelation in the *Fragments* seems to come down on the former side; Kosch 2006, p.180.

<sup>19</sup> Evans 1992, p.114.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the role of this important metaphor in Kierkegaard’s moral psychology, see Stokes 2010a, Ch. 7.



The connection between presence—in this case the presence of Jesus on earth centuries after his death<sup>21</sup>—and particular modes of cognition is a theme that occurs elsewhere in Kierkegaard. In particular, Kierkegaard stresses in the discourse ‘At a Graveside’ that earnest contemplation of our own death brings about a form of co-presence with death such that, *contra* the claims of Epicurus that we can never be where our death is, ‘you are and death also is’ (TDIO, 75/SKS 5: 446).<sup>22</sup> It seems, then, that certain modes of thought have the power to negate the historical distance between contemplator and contemplated, making them, in some sense, actually present with the object in a way even stronger than contemporaneity. It is this sense of co-presence that Gadamer exports from the theological domain to that of art, whereby contemporaneity ‘constitutes the nature of being present; it means that a single thing that presents itself to us achieves in its presentation full presentness, however remote its origin may be’.<sup>23</sup>

It would be tempting to dismiss such claimed co-presence as merely metaphorical, a rhetorical exaggeration meant to instil ‘upbuilding’ urgency in the reader. Sheil seems to regard it as such, taking contemporaneity to be a matter of ‘acting *as if* you were contemporary with Christ’.<sup>24</sup> Yet Kierkegaard seems to want us to take this claimed co-presence seriously; and it’s worth noting that Gadamer takes it seriously too, telling us that contemporaneity is ‘a formulation of the believer’s task of so totally combining one’s own presence and the redeeming act of Christ, that the latter is experienced as something present (not as something in the past) and is taken seriously as such’.<sup>25</sup> This appeal to ‘experience-as’ takes us beyond the metaphorical and elevates contemporaneity to the same status, on the phenomenal level, as direct experience. (Bonhoeffer, too, insists that the ‘presence’ of Christ is not merely metaphorical, though here presence is taken to refer more to the presence of Jesus in the body of the church than to any imaginatively mediated experience).<sup>26</sup>

## Imaginative Distance

If contemporaneity is inextricably linked with a notion of ‘presence’, then we would expect the state against which it is offered as a corrective to be ‘absence’, which would here equate to the non-existence or non-divinity of the historical Jesus. But here as throughout his authorship, Kierkegaard’s target is not declared atheism but rather what he sees as his era’s dominant mode of spiritless, shallow religious conviction, in which Christ is not made *absent*, but is rather kept at a *distance*. Distance is an important recurring motif in Kierkegaard’s writings, and we can distinguish two

<sup>21</sup> It is interesting in this context that, as Evans notes, Climacus says very little about the resurrection. Evans 1992, p.115.

<sup>22</sup> For a fuller discussion of the topic of co-presence with death in Kierkegaard, see Stokes 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Gadamer 1975, p.112.

<sup>24</sup> Sheil 2010, p.3.

<sup>25</sup> Gadamer 1975, p.113.

<sup>26</sup> Jenson 2005, p.155.

distinct, but closely related, forms of such distance in his work. (Some readings seem to run the two forms of distance together without doing much exegetical damage, but they are nonetheless worth treating distinctly.)<sup>27</sup> Each of these forms of imaginative distance has its own use for the 'spiritless' person who nonetheless wishes to regard themselves as a believer. One of these uses is ostensibly directed towards securing faith, but both are ultimately deployed as strategies for evading the moral demand encapsulated in Scriptural narrative.

The first form involves directing attention towards the history that comes between us and the past. In the *Book on Adler*, the pseudonym Petrus Minor gives his voice to *Fragments'* aim of 'cut[ting] away the posthistorical' (*Pap.* VII<sup>2</sup> B 241:4) such that 'the person who becomes a Christian in 1846 becomes that by being contemporary with Christianity's entry into the world in the same sense as the contemporaries were eighteen hundred years ago' (BA, 38/SKS 15, 158). If attention is focussed on the intervening history, however, the central religious theses of Christianity become 'Christianly probable' (BA, 39/ SKS 15, 159) simply on the basis of its endurance. Here we focus not on the object of belief but on that belief's longevity as probabilistic evidence for its truth; while this durability supposedly strengthens our grounds for belief, it directs our attention away from the content of the belief itself. Moreover, probabilistic reasoning always leaves the door to scepticism at least theoretically open. By importing the historical narrative into a quantitative, inductive economy of probability, the contemplator maintains a distance analogous to physical distance with the narrative, by preserving a sliver of doubt that allows her to evade the qualitative transition into belief.

It's important to note here that the subsequent history does nothing to change the putatively factual *content* of the past described in Scripture and imaginatively reconstructed. While events can indeed exert a type of retroactive power over the past by 'making true' descriptions of past events (as when the deposition of Richard II made the long-dead Edward III the second-last Plantagenet king of England), this is not being claimed for the distance created by the later-historical. The scriptural narrative itself is unchanged by the support it receives from subsequent events, just as when evidence is uncovered exonerating a wrongfully convicted person, the fact of their innocence is not thereby instantiated, merely discovered. Hence when we encounter scriptural narratives, the 'picture' we construct will be qualitatively identical whether we then focus on the intervening history or not. The relation of distance imposes itself upon the imaginative content of the experience, transfiguring it not in its content, but in its relation to the contemplator: it becomes a matter of quantitative probability rather than qualitative decision.

<sup>27</sup> Taylor provides an example: 'With the passing of years and the expansion of Christendom, the tension present in the Absolute Paradox gradually relaxes and the incongruity of the Incarnation event is "naturalized." As a result of widespread acceptance, the God-Man becomes inoffensive and the transition from nonbelief to belief seems to be facilitated'. Taylor 1980, pp.135–6.

The second type of distance is apprehended in an imaginative comprehension of the qualitative alterity of the temporally distant world—think of L. P. Hartley's famous epigram, 'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.'<sup>28</sup> Here too, imaginative distance transfigures the content of contemplation. But instead of the distance created by the distraction of an intervening history, the distance here is provided by a sense of the past being radically different from the present, in a way that disconnects it from the order of imperatives which impact upon us in our own historical era. Kierkegaard here appeals to what he seems to take as another brute fact of empirical psychology: it is easier to believe that the extraordinary happened long ago (e.g. BA, 46–7/SKS 15, 168–9). Anti-Climacus makes the same point in *Practice in Christianity*:

And let us not forget: in the situation of contemporaneity signs and wonders have an entirely different elasticity to repel and to attract than this tame, this, as warmed up by the preachers, even tamer bit about signs and wonders eighteen hundred years ago. (PC, 41/SKS 12, 54)

This is a rather curious psychological observation, but there's something to it. Imagined in distant times and locales, the extraordinary can lose at least some of its power to compel awe and be easier to accept. At first glance, this looks like a sheer fact about the psychological resources available to us: extraordinary events situated in an exotic or alien context seem less jarringly incongruous us than ones occurring in our familiar, everyday environment. Yet Anti-Climacus implies that imaginative distance is *used* to defer the moment of choice that such extramundane events demand, and thereby implies that it is within our power to transcend this distance:

In the situation of contemporaneity signs and wonders are something exasperatingly annoying, something that in a very embarrassing way almost forces one to have an opinion, something that, if one does not happen to feel like believing, can be a burdensome thing to be contemporary with, especially since it makes existence far too strenuous, especially the more intelligent, developed, and cultured one is. (PC, 41/SKS 12, 54–5).

The point here is that I can use imaginative distance to keep at bay the need to take up a position on the meaning of past events, especially where these have implications for how I should live now. It allows us to talk about claimed extraordinary events from the past while still, in a larger sense, ignoring them. As a rational, educated person living in an age of science, I can simply suspend judgement on the question of whether Moses actually parted the Red Sea by not bothering to answer it; the UFO hovering over my front lawn right now, however, compels me to take up an epistemic position. I can't evade the question 'is this really happening?' in such a case of immediate presence. Moreover, I can 'delude [my]self into thinking that [I] believe' (PC, 41/SKS 12, 55) in Moses' feats, simply by not honestly confronting the full content of that belief, the enormity of the claims involved. Through avoiding the

<sup>28</sup> Hartley 2002, p.17.

extraordinary character of narrated past events we can accept them as a matter of course, which, Petrus Minor tells us, ‘becomes identical with leaving it undecided’ (BA, 41/SKS 15, 161). Such evasion, it seems, is not possible when the ‘wondrous’ object is directly present to our senses. Conversely, we ‘lap up’ the extraordinary ‘the more easily the longer ago it was’ (BA, 46/SKS 15, 168). Climacus, too, notes the effect of temporal distance upon our epistemic capacities, claiming that ‘Distance in time prompts a mental illusion just as distance in space prompts a sensory illusion’ whereby the contingency of past events comes to be seen retrospectively as having been necessary, ‘just as the person at a distance sees something square as round’ (PF, 79/SKS 4, 279).

Kierkegaard quite possibly has Johan Ludvig Heiberg in mind here. Heiberg had insisted that religious believers demand proof in the form of revelation ‘in the crass belief that the sensible phenomenon can teach them what science cannot’.<sup>29</sup> They are wrong, Heiberg thinks, to look to revelation in this way, for ‘If people in our time do not believe in reason, they believe even less in the senses. And even if miracle after miracle took place, our scepticism would soon finish them off.’<sup>30</sup> Climacus would agree about the scepticism, but not that the answer is a turn to philosophy to overcome it. The testimony of our senses cannot get us to faith, but neither can speculative thought, either.

As Michelle Kosch notes, Hume’s discussion of miracles (which Kierkegaard knew of through his reading of Hamann) lurks unacknowledged in the background of *Fragments*, where Climacus expands Hume’s point about *testimony* as the basis of belief for miracles to cover the *direct experience* of anomalous events.<sup>31</sup> The young Kierkegaard was quite taken by Hamann’s assertion that when Hume caustically declares that anyone who ‘is moved by *Faith* to assent to [Christianity], is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of understanding’,<sup>32</sup> he is, in fact, simply asserting how, for a Christian, it really is (KJN, 1:26/SKS 17, 34). Kosch puts it thus:

Kierkegaard found Hume’s conclusion—that the only way for a believer to explain his belief is as a sort of miracle—to conform to the phenomenological facts of religious belief: not only the fact that it is rationally unjustified, but also the privacy and (human) incommunicability of its grounds, and the moral tenuousness of the situation of a believer who has every reason to think the condition a delusion.<sup>33</sup>

To this we can add another aspect in which the fideist Climacus and the atheist Hume are in unlikely agreement: their shared rejection of an ‘age of miracles’ that is somehow separate from (and thus not subject to the same epistemic conditions as) our own era. One of the key advances of Enlightenment thought is its insistence on what Charles Taylor has called ‘homogenized time’, brought about by a ‘refusal to consider certain “legendary” events as taking place in some higher time, or on some

<sup>29</sup> Heiberg 2005, p.97.

<sup>32</sup> Hume 1985, p.55.

<sup>30</sup> Heiberg 2005, p.97.

<sup>33</sup> Kosch 2006, p.186.

<sup>31</sup> Kosch 2006, pp.185–6.

higher plane of being, that of, say, Gods or heroes'.<sup>34</sup> The legendary past has a mythological aura to it, such that, as Hume remarks, 'When we peruse the first histories of all nations, we are apt to imagine ourselves transported into some new world; where the whole frame of nature is disjointed, and every element performs its operations in a different manner, from what it does at present.'<sup>35</sup> But as we get closer to 'the enlightened ages' this aura of mystification lifts, and from this vantage point we can see that we were wrong to view the legendary past as somehow nomologically and epistemically different. Now, for the first time, legendary time is no longer to be quarantined from the investigative techniques of history, philology, and biblical hermeneutics. Time becomes homogenized because we come to understand ourselves as occupying the *same* realm of temporality as those in the distant past, including the biblical past: there is no longer sacred and profane history, there is, simply, history. And once the past has been made thus continuous with the present, and we are freed to apply our usual evidentiary standards to all points in time, reports of ancient wonders suddenly appear deeply dubious: '*It is strange*, a judicious reader is apt to say, upon the perusal of these wonderful historians, *that such prodigious events never happen in our days*. But it is nothing strange, I hope, that men should lie in all ages.'<sup>36</sup>

We might think Climacus (or certainly Kierkegaard, at any rate) would have little truck with Hume's view. But this is another point at which Kierkegaard can reply to Hume, with Hamann, 'yes, that's just how it is' (KJN, 1:26/SKS 17, 34). Hume argues, in effect, that it's infinitely harder to believe in miracles once one sees time as homogenized: the epistemic standards that legendary time had previously been spared now come into full operation, and what had appeared merely surprising and wonderful (which, being 'agreeable' emotions, incline us towards belief)<sup>37</sup> now appears outlandish and utterly non-credible. Quite so, Climacus can respond, and that's how it *should* be. In homogenized time, the full counter-rational 'offensiveness' of signs and wonders becomes apparent—and it's only in this context that what it truly is to believe in these claims comes fully into view. Maintaining one's imaginative distance is thereby a resistance to this homogenization, and the 'belief' that it engenders avoids a full confrontation with the implications of the extraordinary—and fails, thereby, to be belief at all. Here again we see the tension that I mentioned in the Introduction between Kierkegaard's pre- and post-Enlightenment commitments. Kierkegaard is fully committed, as we'll see, to the notion of 'sacred history', but he also sets up the question of faith against a backdrop of a universe that has already been disenchanting and a past that has been brought into full, naturalistic continuity with our own era. The time in which the God appears is *our* time, and this makes what this flesh-and-blood historical figure reports about himself infinitely more extraordinary, more contrary to immanent rationality, more uncomfortable, and infinitely harder to believe. In Climacus' conception of faith, a thoroughly

<sup>34</sup> Taylor 2007, p.271.

<sup>36</sup> Hume 1985, p.38.

<sup>35</sup> Hume 1985, pp.37–8.

<sup>37</sup> Hume 1985, p.35.

supernatural revelation breaks into a thoroughly natural world, and any attempt to meet that revelation halfway—by supernaturalizing the world as much as by naturalizing the revelation—is antithetical to faith.

## The Missing Element

The experience of imaginative distance, then, involves an imaginative engagement with an object whereby some non-representational element of cognition is missing, an element that *would* be present in direct sensory experience of the same object. It is the presence of this aspect in both direct sensory experience and certain forms of imaginative experience that licences the extension of the term ‘contemporaneity’ to the latter. In other words, there is some element of direct experience that can be either present or absent in imaginative representations, and this element makes an important, categorical difference to the nature of experiences overall.

Recall that at the start of this chapter we saw that Johannes the Seducer regards contemporaneity as a phenomenal element of experience that he, at least, finds absent in episodic memory. It is by virtue of this same element that, as Petrus Minor puts it, even small events in our life ‘really come to grips with’ us (this is the Hongs’ translation of *ret kommer ham paa Livet*) and make a decisive impression, while we can ‘sit in the theatre and see great scenes of tragedy’, ‘read about the extraordinary in the newspaper’, and ‘listen to the pastor’ with no such effect (BA, 42/SKS 15, 162). Petrus blames this failure to ‘become contemporary’ on multiple factors: ‘in the first instance he lacks imagination; in the last he lacks the inner experience for really becoming contemporary with what is depicted, because he thinks like this: it is, of course, many years since it happened’ (BA, 42/SKS 15, 162).

If the contemporaneity-conferring element of experience is not to be found in the conceptually and/or visually structured content of our imaginative engagement with the past, it may seem we can say precious little more about it. If contemporaneity in no way changes the *content* of the object of imaginative engagement, then the cognitive factors essential to contemporaneity would appear to be non-conceptual in character. Nonetheless we can speak of experience ‘coming to grips with’ us and similar metaphors of the experiences’ impression upon us in order to give some sense of the character of contemporaneous experience. Moreover, we can pick out the conceptual space the contemporaneity-conferring element occupies, as Anti-Climacus does when he refers to contemporaneity as ‘the difference between poetry and actuality’ (PC, 63/SKS 12, 75). The poetic, being a mere register of possibility, is set up in opposition to the actual, but to this opposition is then added the move to subjectivity: the past may be actual relative to the merely imaginary (poetic), but the past is nonetheless *not* actual on the subjective level to the extent that it lacks a key element:

The qualification that is lacking—which is the qualification of truth (as inwardness) and of all religiousness is—*for you*. The past is not actuality—for me. Only the contemporary is actuality

for me. That with which you are living simultaneously is actuality—for you. Thus every human being is able to become contemporary only with the time in which he is living—and then with one more, with Christ's life upon earth, for Christ's life upon earth, the sacred history, stands alone by itself, outside history. (PC, 64/SKS 12, 76)

Hence contemporaneity is here regarded as a property of experience that makes the past actual *for* the contemplator. The past is real insofar as, through contemporaneity, it is *for me*. (Bonhoeffer takes this thought further: 'Christ is Christ not as Christ in himself, but in his relation to me. His being Christ is his being *pro me* . . . Christ can never be thought of in his being in himself, but only in his relationship to me'.)<sup>38</sup> The theme recurs in *Adler*, where we are told that it makes an 'infinite difference' whether 'one for one's own sake considers something in the situation of contemporaneity' or instead 'casually thinks about something in the delusion that it was eighteen hundred years ago' (BA, 44/SKS 15, 166). At the same time, Anti-Climacus circumscribes the field of objects we can become contemporary with to our own lives and the life of Jesus.<sup>39</sup> Given that Anti-Climacus' concern is Jesus *qua* object of imitation, this places contemporaneity into the context of Anti-Climacus' nuanced account of ethical imagination, in which the self is brought into a reflexively moral relation with the object of contemplation.

In *Practice in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus deploys an extended hypothetical discussion of a youth and his relation to 'some image of perfection (ideal)', whether this has the actuality of having existed historically or the mere 'thought-actuality' of the purely imaginary (PC, 186/SKS 12, 186). The youth's imagination 'draws' the youth and the image together such that the image becomes an ideal for the youth's action (PC, 186–96/SKS 12, 186–94). This sense of being *claimed* by the imaginary, which thereby comes to inform one's actions, anchors the imaginative image to the actuality of the imaginer.<sup>40</sup> Through the medium of imagination, the exemplar becomes *present* to the contemplator, in an immediately compelling way that does not allow the demands the exemplar makes to be kept at imaginative distance. We might expect from this example that contemporaneity is conferred by some property internal to the image, perhaps to be understood as some form of vividness or depth of detail. If this were the case, the compelling quality of the exemplar the youth imagines would reside in something like the 'realness' of the image, the extent to which it has the same sensory character as direct experience. We would then have an explanation for the ease with which we can assent to the extraordinary when it is temporally distant: put simply, when we imagine these scenarios, they lack the experiential detail of real

<sup>38</sup> Bonhoeffer 1966, pp.47–8.

<sup>39</sup> Note that in *Two Ages* Kierkegaard does speak of becoming contemporary with other persons as a support to the individual, support that an abstract public cannot provide (TA, 91/SKS 8, 87). Hence this Anti-Climacian restriction may not be one Kierkegaard 'himself' would fully endorse.

<sup>40</sup> I discuss this example in Stokes 2010a, pp.90–2.

events, and therefore make a less shocking impression upon us. Is this what the Kierkegaard of *Book on Adler* means when he accuses the apathetic theatregoer of lacking imagination? Does the 'for-me' quality of imagination depend upon imagination being 'true to life' in this way?

## Verisimilitude?

Though superficially satisfying, this option must, I think, be rejected. The impossibility of direct recognizability in the paradigm case of contemporaneity-with-Christ already places the necessary conditions for contemporaneity beyond the 'visual' composition of the experience. If the divinity of Jesus can't be directly perceived, then whatever confers contemporaneity cannot be contained within the sensibilia that constitute the substance of the imaginative reconstruction. In short, if we don't become contemporary with Jesus because of what Jesus *looks like*, then the accuracy, detail and level of visual 'resolution' (in something like the photographic sense) cannot determine whether or not we become 'contemporary' with the image. In *Fragments*, Climacus makes it clear that the sort of meanings to be derived through contemporaneity with past events cannot be gotten at through imaginative verisimilitude, such that a more detailed imaginative representation or historical description will deliver proportionally more of this meaning: 'Any apprehension of the past that thinks to understand it thoroughly by constructing it has only thoroughly misunderstood it' (PF, 79/SKS 4, 279).

This is not merely a commentary on the limitations of our imaginative capacities (which, as we have seen, Climacus is very conscious of, and which is also a concern of Anti-Climacus and Johannes the Seducer in their different ways). It is certainly the case that reconstructions of the past—imaginative or discursive—are always less detailed, more coarsely grained than the circumstances they seek to replicate. If I stage a re-enactment of the Battle of Culloden, meticulously recreated down to the smallest historical and topographical detail, inevitably *some* detail will be left out. It may be that the recreation in the unfettered theatre of my imagination may have no such blemishes, but even so I simply won't have the imaginative resources to recreate fully the experience of an eighteenth-century battle down to the smallest perceptible detail. Whether this is a merely empirical fact about human psychology or something more metaphysically fundamental is irrelevant to Climacus' argument. His claim is both stronger and more narrow: if we try to *understand* the past through a reconstruction of it, we do not merely fail to achieve this understanding, we 'thoroughly *misunderstand*' it. It is not simply that merely historical inquiry can never achieve perfect comprehension of its object, but rather that an entire register of meaning is missed by this type of inquiry, and further, that this order of meaning is essential to *really* understanding at least one class of historical event.



As noted, Anti-Climacus tells us that it is precisely in *my* relation to what is imagined, in that what is encountered imaginatively is *for me*, that contemporaneity is to be located. *My* relation, however, is nowhere to be found in (most) imaginatively mediated events from the past. In my re-enactment of the Battle of Culloden, the impeccable historical accuracy of my costume, movements, and perhaps even physiological state (underfed, under-slept etc.) can't supply everything essential to the experience of a Jacobite soldier facing the Government lines in 1746. It is not *my* life that is at risk, nor my people or culture I am fighting for—because of course, *I* am not fighting *at all*.<sup>41</sup> Whatever moral demands I may be subject to, fighting *for this* cause is not among them. And unlike the combatants, *I know* the outcome of the battle and its ramifications (recall that among the elements in contemporaneous experience that Johannes the Seducer despairs of reproducing in his recollection of conversations is 'the surprise in the outburst'). All of these factors constitute a gulf between me and the past event I seek to recreate, but crucially, *none* of these factors is contained on the immediately sensory level. Yet equally crucially, the gulf *is* nonetheless experiential; the fact of distance is not uncovered on a merely reflective level whereby I only apprehend my distance from what I imagine in a subsequent thought *about* that distance ('it's only a re-enactment'). In Husserl's terminology, the 'act-characters' of experiencing a battle and experiencing a recreation differ, despite their sensorally identical intentional objects.<sup>42</sup> The experience itself is *lacking* something, however complete its sensible content may be.

Conversely, when an imaginative episode *does* stand in some relation to my actual self, it is pervaded by something from outside itself, and it is *this*, and not anything proper to the image *as such*, which gives it its decisive meaning for my *actual* self. Marya Schechtman describes with great clarity the sort of supervenience we are speaking of:

The sensory experience of a dramatic thunderstorm is qualitatively different in a consciousness that also includes a terror of storms, or a worry about friends travelling in the rain, than in one which includes a feeling of how warm and cosy it is by the fire—even if the details of the sensory inputs themselves are identical in the two cases.<sup>43</sup>

In the case of a long-ago battle, whether recreated in the world or in my mind's eye, the scrupulously authentic and detailed 'sensory inputs' cannot alter a key feature of the experience: that this battle is just not *for me* in the way that it was for the combatants.

<sup>41</sup> For an interesting thought-experiment that attempts to overcome this in an immersive virtual reality scenario, see Dainton 2008, pp.15–16.

<sup>42</sup> Husserl 2001, p.105; for a discussion of this passage, see Zahavi 2005, p.118.

<sup>43</sup> Schechtman 1996, p.138.

## The Self-reflexive Imagination

This idea of a relation between imagination and the imagining self that goes beyond the immediate resources of what is imagined is a key theme in *The Sickness Unto Death*. In that work, Anti-Climacus develops a nuanced account of the place of imagination (*phantasie*) in moral agency. Though imagination is the ‘capacity *instar omnium* [capacity for all capacities]’ that makes our mental life possible (SUD, 31/SKS 11, 147), and is therefore a necessary condition for moral agency, *phantasie* can also render the self *phantastiske*, leading the self away from its situation in a realm of concrete ethical demands, and into a ‘despair of infinitization’. Such despair can only be overcome through an exercise of imagination that somehow tethers the concrete (actuality) and infinite (imagination) together, such that the agent ‘continually become[s] proportionately as concrete as it is abstract, so that the more infinite it becomes in purpose and determination, the more personally present and contemporary [*nærværende og samtidig*] it becomes in the small part of the task that can be carried out at once’ (SUD, 32/SKS 11, 148).<sup>44</sup>

Anti-Climacus returns to this theme in *Practice in Christianity*, where the person suffering the despair of infinitization ‘has let himself be enticed by his imagination to go out too far, so he has become overwrought and ridiculous and does not fit into the actual world’ (PC, 189/SKS 12, 189). Similarly, in the *Christian Discourses* of 1848 Kierkegaard bemoans ‘how rare is the person who actually is contemporary with himself; ordinarily most people are apocalyptically, in theatrical illusions, hundreds of thousands of miles ahead of themselves in feelings, in delusions, in intentions, in resolutions, in wishings, in longings’ (CD, 74/SKS 10, 83). Linking the attainment of contemporaneity to the ‘grounding’ of imagination necessary for avoiding despair, Anti-Climacus describes a misuse of *phantasie* which keeps the imaginer from becoming contemporary with the figure of Christ—a morally obligating figure that compels individual response. Here the capacity of *phantasie* to generate ‘a fantastic figure of Christ, to which one then relates at the distance of imagination’<sup>45</sup> allows the imaginer to evade the ‘offence’ proper to an encounter with the figure of Christ (PC, 100/SKS 12, 109). Were Christ to be encountered in the situation of contemporaneity, however, we could not evade the necessity of responding to the challenge posed by this figure. We would be confronted with a stark choice: ‘the only way to avoid the possibility of offence is to believe’ (PC, 101/SKS 12, 109). We have here returned to the power of the extraordinary to compel a response, a power that, as we have seen, is only efficacious if the subject confronts the extraordinary directly, rather

<sup>44</sup> This paragraph summarizes the core argument of Stokes 2010a, pp.73–90.

<sup>45</sup> See also *Fear and Trembling*: ‘We are touched, we look back on those beautiful times. Sweet sentimental longing leads us to the goal of our desire, to see Christ walking about in the promised land. We forget the anxiety, the distress, the paradox. Was it such a simple matter not to make a mistake? Was it not terrifying that this man walking around among the others was God? ... I do not feel brave enough to wish to become a contemporary’ (FT, 66/SKS 4, 158).

than quarantining ourselves from the implications of the extraordinary via the imposition of imaginative distance.

Contemporaneity, then, is crucially linked to the experience of an event as *normatively compelling*, and that in a specifically self-directed way. In contemporaneity, we experience events in the reconstructed past as directly implicating, involving, or obligating us in the here-and-now, 'directly' here indicating that the experience claims us in exactly the same way as events with which we are temporally and spatially co-located. I can ignore the starving child I see on my TV while acknowledging the moral demand implicit in her suffering, but the same child sitting right in front of me makes a demand *of me*, one that I can *only* accede to or refuse. I cannot shelter behind the distance of mediation provided by my television; I cannot evade my personal responsibility in this situation of direct co-presence. It's in precisely this sense that, Kierkegaard claims, Scripture speaks *directly* and *personally* to the reader who becomes contemporary with what it depicts. (I suspect it's precisely because he lacks such a sense of normative import that Johannes the Seducer can't recreate the element of contemporaneity in his relationship to Cordelia: he doesn't feel normatively claimed by anything, and so his experience of episodic memory can't become reflexive in this way).

Such a relation is not apprehended reflectively, at least in the sense of the relation itself becoming an explicit object of reflection. When we become contemporary with events depicted in Scripture, according to Kierkegaard, our contemporaneity itself does not become an object of overt thought; we don't think thoughts such as 'this involves me'. Such overt thematizing would be precisely to think 'one thought too many',<sup>46</sup> for it would divert our attention from the correct object of contemplation. In contemporaneity, by contrast, our sense of being involved supervenes *upon* the experience rather than being a reflective addendum to it.

The experiential result of this supervenient sense of self-involvement in the scene we imagine is that I become co-present with the events depicted in Scripture; I become a listener to the Sermon on the Mount in that I experience it as addressed *directly* to me as much as to the contemporaries. This subjective mode of being 'alone with Scripture' amounts to a continuous (if non-thematized) awareness that '*It is I to whom it is speaking; it is I about whom it is speaking*' (FSE, 35/SKS 13, 62). In this mode, we experience Scripture as talking to the reader as a specific individual, not as the generalized, abstract figure of 'the reader'. As Nishitani Keiji notes, this individuating power of religious narratives cuts across religious traditions: compare Paul's declaration that Jesus 'gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20) and Shinran's claim that 'When I carefully consider the Vow which Amida brought forth after five kalpas' contemplation, I find that it was solely for me, Shinran.'<sup>47</sup> There is no mediation here: the believer is addressed directly and personally as if they themselves

<sup>46</sup> The phrase is from Williams 1982, p.18.

<sup>47</sup> Nishitani 1982, p.27; see Shinran 1997, p.679.

were interlocutors. It is *Paul* for whom the event of Jesus' death occurs, and it is *Shinran* for whom the event of Amitābha's vowing to save all beings from suffering occurs. On the propositional level it is of course true that the death and the vow occur for *all* people, and thus they are done *for* Paul and Shinran only insofar as they are members of that set; but on the phenomenal level the effect is of a direct personal address, whereby the viewer sees themselves as personally involved every bit as much as if they had been historically present at the event. This is familiar enough from non-religious contexts too: the famous First World War recruitment posters declaring 'Lord Kitchener [or Uncle Sam] Wants *You!*' are meant to be experienced as speaking directly and individually to the person who sees the poster (otherwise they wouldn't work as recruitment posters), even though Lord Kitchener knows nothing of any of the individuals seeing it.<sup>48</sup> In seeing that poster, you're alone, face-to-face, with Lord Kitchener; likewise, according to Climacus, the believer at second-hand is nonetheless face-to-face with the incarnation of God.

## The De-historicization Objection

And here, according to the objection put forward by Taylor, Kierkegaard's anti-Hegelianism has led him into absurdity, for such historically unmediated understanding of the historical is impossible. Our understanding of the past is not static, but formed by an ongoing process of historical formation; hence we cannot come at past events in the same way the contemporaries<sub>t</sub> would have, unencumbered by the baggage of two millennia of theology and philology. If Kierkegaard is talking about contemporaneity with the incarnation, then our very understanding of this historical event *as* the incarnation already shows just how far our understanding has come from that available to those immediately contemporary<sub>t</sub> with the event.

Yet it should be clear by now that historically unconditioned understanding is *not* what Kierkegaard is claiming as contemporaneity-with-Christ. Contemporaneity is conferred by an *immediately self-reflexive* mode of vision, that is, one in which we (non-reflectively) apprehend *our relation* to what is imagined *within* the imaginative experience, rather than apprehending that relation in a subsequent reflective moment. What I see somehow refers *back* to me without me being part of its explicit content. It is the 'for-me' quality, the personally claiming quality that supervenes upon what is contemplated, that constitutes the contemporaneous character of the experience. The experience is pervaded by a non-thematized sense of involvement, a sense that 'this concerns *me*' even though I am nowhere to be found in its objective content.

The understanding that structures the experience will indeed be determined by the linguistic, cultural, philosophical, and theological history that has shaped us as

<sup>48</sup> Thanks to an anonymous journal referee for suggesting this analogy; I should note that the referee did not agree with my reading of contemporaneity.

contemplators; I cannot unlearn two thousand years of history and science and occupy the same epistemic horizons as someone living in first-century Judea. But in contemporaneity our historically conditioned understanding of what the past *means* is not itself the thematized object of our contemplation. The Kierkegaardian contemporary does not reflect *on* the putative religious meanings of the incarnation; rather she is present *with* the incarnation. She perceives it rather than reflects on it. What she sees the figure *as* is of course determined by her place in a history of interpretation, but this in no way impedes the phenomenal experience of contemporaneity. It is through this non-thematized quality of experience, rather than in some impossible revocation of the historically mediated elements of understanding, that we overleap the temporal gap that separates us from the past. Whether such a form of self-reflexive contemplation in fact occurs is another question, one which goes to the plausibility of Kierkegaard's phenomenological psychology. But it is clear that Kierkegaard *does* give an account as to how subjectivity can bring together the two moments of history that meet in contemporaneity. Hence his rejection of the Hegelian account of processive historical development does not commit him to an incoherent view of how we understand the past.

## Contemporaneity and Soteriological Identity

Moreover, when contemporaneity as co-presence is understood in this way as a product of self-reflexive vision, the previously disturbing word 'autopsy' takes on a new, deeper meaning. 'Autopsy', 'self-seeing' implies not just 'seeing for oneself' but 'seeing oneself' in that vision: in the context of *Fragments*, seeing the figure of Christ *for oneself* by becoming contemporary with him, but also thereby seeing *oneself* in soteriological categories that are only disclosed in this encounter. This is, as Marius Mjaaland puts it, 'autopsy in the proper sense, that is a diagnostic introspection based on radical ignorance'.<sup>49</sup> Retaining the more modern sense of 'autopsy', Simon Podmore parses this autopsy as a 'dissection by faith', in which the self 'must see itself initially through the anatomy of its own disintegration'<sup>50</sup>—in seeing itself in this way the self comes to see that it is not a self-positing, independent power, but rather utterly dependent upon God. Hence in apprehending the historical event which serves as an exemplar and condition for personal salvation, I simultaneously apprehend *myself* as being a certain way (morally obligated, saved, damned etc.), precisely because the experience involves an immediate self-reflexivity. This self-apprehension is a feature of Bonhoeffer's Christology, in which, as Peter Selby notes, 'the question of identity is mutual; those who examine the identity of Christ will find their own identity questioned'.<sup>51</sup> Such questioning, says Matt Jenson, is a 'double questioning',<sup>52</sup> a phrase redolent with resonances to Kierkegaardian 'double

<sup>49</sup> Mjaaland 2006, p.385.

<sup>50</sup> Podmore 2011, p.11.

<sup>51</sup> Selby 1997, p.27.

<sup>52</sup> Jenson 2005, p.144.

reflection'.<sup>53</sup> In seeing-for-oneself, we see ourselves, and in so doing, gain the self we see. I'll have more to say on this notion of soteriological identity in Chapter 9.

## Coda: The Impossibility of Contemporaneity

This concludes our discussion of the phenomenal aspects of contemporaneity, at precisely the point at which most Kierkegaard commentators have begun their engagement with contemporaneity. This is so because the phenomenology of contemporaneity-with-Christ is quickly subsumed in Kierkegaard's writings by the ethical requirement of contemporaneity as acting and suffering in the world. The demand to experience co-presence, constituted as such presence is by its normative, obligating character, is taken up into a requirement of *Imitatio Christi*, whereby the criterion for contemporaneity shifts from a form of *experience* to a form of *action*. Merold Westphal marks this transition thus:

Contemporaneity now takes on a new and deeper meaning (without abandoning the earlier meaning). It is not just *finding* oneself in essentially the same epistemic ambiguity as the Inviter's immediate contemporaries; it is *choosing* not just to receive his help but also to share his life.<sup>54</sup>

This transition from the world of interior experience to the realm of concrete action completely transfigures the criteria for success, such that becoming contemporary with Christ now depends (as a necessary though by no means sufficient condition) upon acting in a certain way. In *The Moment*, Kierkegaard tells us that to become contemporary with a 'truth witness' is precisely to suffer the consequences of acknowledging them; if none are to be found in contemporaneity, what is required is an imaginative confrontation with the figures of the past that 'make[s] present the life of the departed glorious one in such a way that you thereby would come to suffer as you would have suffered in contemporaneity if you had acknowledged a prophet to

<sup>53</sup> Invoking Kierkegaard's complex notion of 'double-reflection' here does not necessarily tell against my earlier claim that contemporaneity is not a *reflective* relationship, in one key sense of reflection at least. Double-reflection, as it applies to the project of indirect communication exemplified by the pseudonyms, is a presentation of two opposing ethical possibilities, thereby implicitly confronting the listener with a choice (see e.g. Malantschuk 1993, p.131). In this way the 'doubleness' of the reflection consists not just in the opposites from which one must choose, but the fact that in contemplating the choice I simultaneously contemplate my own relation to what is being communicated insofar as I am impelled to choose. In relating to what's presented as objects of *choice* I am implicitly relating back to myself as chooser. Yet I don't necessarily do so reflectively in the sense of thinking thoughts explicitly *about* my relation to what I contemplate ('this choice is mine to make' etc.). The choice itself—not my status as one compelled to choose—is what fills the contents of my thoughts, yet my status is nonetheless non-thetically present in this way of thinking insofar as I am deliberating and not merely disinterestedly contemplating. This is even clearer in the case of the incarnation, where the communicator is *precisely the object of contemplation*, yet takes a form in which direct communication is impossible. See PC, 133–4/SKS 12, 137–8. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* for originally pressing me to clarify this point.

<sup>54</sup> Westphal 2004, pp.37–8. Stan (2014) likewise sees *samtidighed* as intrinsically linked with imitation.

be a prophet' (TM, 289/SKS 13, 347).<sup>55</sup> This suffering, however, is inflicted within and by the present world, not an imaginatively apprehended past world. It is for this reason that Murray Rae can declare that contemporaneity's 'personal relation to Christ' is 'a relation that takes place *not primarily as a matter of the intellect or imagination*, but rather as the venture of one's life in obedience to Christ'.<sup>56</sup> As we have seen, imagination is utterly essential to the experience of contemporaneity on a cognitive level; however, Kierkegaard continually enjoins us not to allow imagination to take us out of the world altogether, and so on the level of direct action, the real is to be emphasized over the imaginary.

Ultimately, though, the *Imitatio Christi* as a telos of ethics is one that we cannot live up to, and so contemporaneity in this fullest and highest sense—which would be to live the life and die the death of Christ—can never be completely achieved, however hard we may engage in this 'prodigious exertion' (SKS 24, 124):

On closer inspection all this talk about wishing to have been contemporary with Christ is presumptuous; for what is it but fancying oneself to be good enough to be an apostle... those who talk this way about contemporaneity do not know what they are saying; it is the usual thing: they take the glory and leave out the difficulty. It is flirtation. (JP, 694/SKS 22, 390; NB14: 68)

So there are clear limitations on how far we can become *practically* contemporary with Christ. But this takes nothing away from the phenomenal analysis of contemporaneity as a mode of experience we've uncovered here. Across the following chapters, I intend to show the utility of this analysis to a variety of topics in personal identity theory, from very basic questions about perspectival accessibility to more complex phenomena of identity loss and alienation from our own lives.

<sup>55</sup> This point is reiterated at TM, 291/SKS 13, 349.

<sup>56</sup> Rae 2004, p.88, my emphasis.

# 3

## Perspectival Subjectivity

### A Puzzle about Memory

We saw in Chapter 1 that the relationship between memory and identity remains controversial, but the sense that memory matters *somehow* to personal identity is hard to exorcise. That memory seems somehow central to our sense of who we are, even if attempts to build a metaphysical account of identity on the basis of memory have not been overwhelmingly successful, reflects the ways in which our *experience* of identity is bound up with memory and anticipation. In the normal run of everyday life, we don't encounter the sort of puzzling science fiction scenarios described in the neo-Lockean literature (though as I mentioned in the Introduction, certain illnesses can play havoc with our diachronic and even synchronic sense of identity—schizophrenia, for instance, can disrupt the patient's sense of ownership of their thoughts, effectively shattering their synchronic unity).<sup>1</sup> But we do sometimes find ourselves alienated from the past we remember and the future we anticipate, as I'll be discussing in Chapter 5. Memory and anticipation are essential features of our psychological, social, moral, and agential lives, and both seem to track a stable, diachronically extended entity that is the object of my self-reference.

On an overcast day in July 2005, I fulfilled a promise I'd made my partner years before, when we were just teenagers, that one day I'd propose to her on a bridge in Paris. This event stands at the intersection of a range of forward-directed and backwards-directed mental events: the framing of intentions for the future; the recollection of past intentions and promises (coloured by awareness of the intervening years) and resolving to carry them out in the present; the acknowledgment of long-standing obligations and the creation of new obligations with the intention that these will be binding in the future; the anticipation of things to come, including how I'll remember the present moment in the future; and the sense of continuity between past, present, and future. (Needless to say, none of that was on my mind at the time; I was more concerned about finding a bridge near Notre Dame that wasn't swarming with tourists). All of these recollections, promises, intentions, and anticipations seem to depend upon continued identity across time. They assume that the teen making the somewhat flippant promise, the imagined future groom and husband, and the

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Sass 1999; Sass and Parnas 2003.



nervous guy looking for a suitably romantic bridge are all one and the same—that when I say ‘I remember the day I proposed, in the way I’d promised to do many years before’ the referent of ‘I’ is the same in each of the three instances in that sentence. At the very least, the event seems to involve some sort of privileged access to a specific remembered past and a specific anticipated future, such that the obligations and anticipated pleasures which this specific past and future present apply *uniquely* to me. But that assumes that there is some essential difference between my *remembering* making that past promise and someone else simply *imagining* having made that past promise, or simply *imagining* being married to my (now) wife instead of *anticipating* it. In what does that difference consist? Or put another way: when I have a memory or anticipate a future event, what is it that makes that memory or anticipation genuinely *reflexive*? This is a question that is very much alive in the contemporary literature.

## Memory and Visualization

The problem of reflexivity is particularly salient when we think of both episodic memory<sup>2</sup> and anticipation in terms of *visualization*, though it may well have analogues in at least some other sensory modalities.<sup>3</sup> (It may seem wrong to place this sort of emphasis on the visual aspects of memory and imagination, but as the discussion of ‘autopsy’ in the last chapter suggested, Kierkegaard also comes back again and again to visual language). Episodic memories present themselves as ostensible copies of some originally visual experience, even when they don’t appear to depend on a *single* experience—if I visualize the house I grew up in, it’s far from clear that I am remembering a single, theoretically datable instance of walking through my house.<sup>4</sup> Richard Wollheim claims episodic memories can be either centred (remembered from a specific point of view within the imagined event) or acentred;<sup>5</sup> the now-standard distinction in the literature between ‘field’ and ‘observer’ memories<sup>6</sup> captures the same thought. Wollheim takes centred memory to be the standard case of memory,<sup>7</sup> an assumption contested by John Sutton, who rejects the view that ‘visuospatial perspective is still the canonical or privileged form of personal memory’.<sup>8</sup> I’ll return to observer memories below, but for the moment—though mindful of Sutton’s argument against privileging field over observer memory—we’ll concentrate on field memories.

The core features of field/centred memories is a certain form of visual organization that implies an experiencer located at some (at least theoretically) specifiable distance and position relative to the events observed. There have been several articulations of

<sup>2</sup> On the distinction between episodic and semantic memory, see Tulving 1983, p.v *passim* (especially Part I, pp.17–120).

<sup>3</sup> Debus 2007, p.189.

<sup>4</sup> Debus 2007, p.176.

<sup>5</sup> Wollheim 1989, p.102.

<sup>6</sup> Nigro and Neisser 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Wollheim 1989, p.104.

<sup>8</sup> Sutton 2010, p.29.

this ‘perspectival organization’ feature of visualizations (including experiential memories), but J. David Velleman’s is arguably the clearest:

A visual image has a perspective because objects are represented in it by regions whose size and placement depend on the angles subtended by those objects at some common point in space. The representational scheme of the image is governed by lines of sight converging at a single vantage point, whose location the image suggests but doesn’t depict.<sup>9</sup>

In any representational visualization of spatially arranged objects (even acentered ones)<sup>10</sup> the mere fact of convergent perspective *necessarily* implies a viewpoint, though as Velleman notes we don’t always think of this viewpoint as actually being *occupied*<sup>11</sup>—just as, in Bernard Williams’ example, when we watch a movie with a tracking shot along the side of a castle wall, or an intimate scene between two lovers, we are not ‘invited to think of Griffith or Antonioni floating up towers or creeping around lovers’.<sup>12</sup> This, according to Velleman, is what distinguishes visualization *simpliciter* from the more complex exercise of ‘imagined seeing’;<sup>13</sup> in the latter (which will include episodic memory and anticipatory imagination) we *do* think of the viewpoint as occupied. All *secondary mental images*—that is, visualizations that purport to present *someone’s* experience—come equipped with a built-in ‘notional subject’ occupying the viewpoint implied by perspectival organization.<sup>14</sup>

But although the perspectival organization of images implies *a* subject, whose eyes are located where the lines of sight converge,<sup>15</sup> we might know little or nothing about who this implied observer is *meant* to be—and there is certainly no requirement that the protagonist of a centrally imagined scene must be *me*, the self imagining or remembering it.<sup>16</sup> So Velleman distinguishes between the *notional subject* and *actual subject* of secondary mental images.<sup>17</sup> The notional subject is the viewer implied by perspectival organization, ‘the person thought of as occupying the image’s vantage point and undergoing the visual impression of which the image is a copy’.<sup>18</sup> The actual subject is the person doing the visualization or having the visual memory. And insofar as I can imagine a scene where the notional subject is someone other than

<sup>9</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.179. See also Smith 2006, pp.52–3; Goldie 2000, p.196.

<sup>10</sup> Wollheim 1989, p.104.

<sup>11</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.179; see also Goldie 2012, p.78.

<sup>12</sup> Williams 1973, p.37. Similar considerations lead Kendall Walton to conclude that visual depictions are not (standardly) mediated through a fictional observer in the same way that narrated events are mediated through a narrator, though there are cases where, for instance, movie shots are framed to imply we are seeing an object through the eyes of one of the film’s characters. Walton 1976, pp.49–61; Walton 1990, pp.337–40. See also Goldie 2000, p.196. An anonymous referee points out to me here that we may be conditioned to the filmic perspective through our experience of dreams; personally I seem to dream in field perspective, but as Rosen and Sutton (2013) note, observer perspective dreams certainly do happen.

<sup>13</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.179.

<sup>14</sup> For this reason, according to Wollheim, acentered event-memories are both rare and unstable: even though these are not meant to represent an event from an observer’s perspective, their very visual organization implies *some* observer, and so (he claims) we quickly move to imaginatively ‘occupy’ the point of view around which the memory is organized.

<sup>15</sup> Even where the image is supposedly mediated through a telephoto lens or the like.

<sup>16</sup> Wollheim 1989, p.74.

<sup>17</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.186.

<sup>18</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.182.

me—in Williams' well-worn example, I can visualize the battlefield at Austerlitz as seen from the viewpoint of Napoleon<sup>19</sup>—the notional and actual subject can be two different people.

The question, then, with respect to reflexive secondary mental images such as episodic memories or imaginative anticipations, is what might constitute a connection between the notional and actual subject—and it seems that nothing *within* secondary mental images themselves will do the trick. Derek Parfit notes that apparent memories, even when experienced in a 'first person mode of presentation', include no reference to the rememberer herself,<sup>20</sup> while as we'll see in Chapter 4, Galen Strawson argues that while the perspectival convergence of sensory data gives episodic memory a 'from the inside character', this character 'can detach completely from any lived identification with the subject of the remembered experience'.<sup>21</sup> Further, Williams notes that the perspectival structure of *any* visualized scene no more refers back to the visualizing self than the spatial composition of a movie scene or play refers me back to my situation as viewer. I may be sitting in a theatre seat 40 meters away from Sir Ian McKellen, but I am not simultaneously at that distance, or *any* specifiable distance, from Lear.<sup>22</sup>

Likewise with static visual images. Kierkegaard's Golden Age contemporary, the painter C. W. Eckersberg, produced at least two portraits and several drawings of a model he dubbed 'Florentine'. The more demure of these two portraits now hangs in the Hirschprung Collection in Copenhagen. It's an unsettlingly intimate image: Florentine stands with her back to us, seemingly unaware of our presence as she goes about her morning *toilette*. The tension is heightened by a sense that at any moment she will look up and see us reflected in the mirror in front of her. Yet on a more fundamental level, of course, *we* aren't in Florentine's room at all. Even if we take it that Eckersberg is deliberately trying to imply a visual perspective from a position within Florentine's room, and inviting the viewer to imaginatively occupy that position, such an implied perspective is ultimately *not* that of the viewer standing in the Hirschprung, staring at the portrait and perhaps being taken aback to find it's much smaller than they had expected. The notional subject of the image—the person apparently standing in Florentine's room—is not the actual subject that views it.

The famous painting of Florentine comes from a session between 9 August and 16 September 1841, at which Eckersberg and five students were present. In addition to Eckersberg's, two other portraits from this session survive, by Ludvig August Smith and Salomon (Sally) Henriques.<sup>23</sup> Despite striking differences in style, all three paintings unmistakably depict the same woman, in the same pose (though curiously, other details of the room have been altered), but from their slightly different angles

<sup>19</sup> Williams 1973, p.43.

<sup>20</sup> Parfit 1984, p.221. Parfit credits the term 'first-person mode of presentation' to Peacocke 1983.

<sup>21</sup> Strawson 1999, p.109.

<sup>22</sup> Williams 1973, p.35 (updating Williams' reference to Olivier).

<sup>23</sup> Fabritius 2005.

we can infer that Smith was standing to Eckersberg's right and Henriques further right again.<sup>24</sup> Mentally, we can partially reconstruct the room using these three paintings, with Florentine standing in front of a mirror, Eckersberg in front of her having reserved the best position for himself, putting Smith in a slightly more awkward position, and Henriques in a worse position again with the light from the window dazzling him.<sup>25</sup> Yet such reconstruction is secondary to an encounter with each individual painting and relies on features that are wholly extrinsic to each image itself. Each image is self-contained: each references nothing outside the image, and none of the images is, in and of itself, co-ordinate with the others. We can tell where Eckersberg, Smith, and Henriques were standing, but that these are the perspectives *of Eckersberg* or *of Smith* or *of Henriques* is nowhere to be found in the painting. We can infer the position of the artist just as we can infer the position of a camera from a photograph, but the artist and the camera are not 'in' the world of the image in a fundamental sense any more than your eye is 'in' your field of vision right now.

Even anamorphic visual effects in two-dimensional images which depend upon the physical position of the viewer don't thereby reference the viewer's position in any way. If I find myself in front of Holbein's *The Ambassadors* in the National Gallery in London, I will need to stand in exactly the right spot relative to the painting's surface in order to see the giant skull which would otherwise appear as a puzzling whitish mass in the foreground. But this in no way implies any relation between my position as an observer and any position within the field of objects depicted in the painting. The image doesn't care, so to speak, about my spatial relation to the world of the image; my present position is simply nowhere to be found in the field of objects captured in the painting, the play, or the movie. To the best of my knowledge, no-one has yet given this feature of visual organization a name, so let's give it one now: *structural indifference*. Images are structurally indifferent insofar as they contain no internal or implicit reference to their viewer. It follows that Wollheim's claim that 'the only point from which I can centrally remember an event is mine' must be subject to severe caveats: unless we make further stipulations about the relationship between memory and identity, it is not strictly true that 'I am necessarily the protagonist of my event-memories'<sup>26</sup> unless we are using 'I' in the sense of a quasi-indicator.<sup>27</sup> Structural indifference would seem to entail that nothing within the visualization itself can secure the co-identity of the notional and actual subject.

So why should any of this be a problem? There are two main reasons why this disconnect between the notional and actual subject of memories might bother us. The first arises if we subscribe to the memory criterion view of personal identity. But it's the second reason that motivates Wollheim and Velleman: the need to specify in what sense memories are qualitatively different from other mental states such as

<sup>24</sup> Fabritius 2005; Berman 2007, p.56.

<sup>25</sup> Fabritius 2005, p.362.

<sup>26</sup> Wollheim 1989, p.105.

<sup>27</sup> Velleman 2006a, pp.184–6; see also Hector-Neri Castañeda 1967, 1968.

imagination. It's clear that there is *some* experiential difference between remembering seeing Austerlitz (whether veridically or not) and imagining being Napoleon seeing Austerlitz. In the latter case, 'the notional reflexivity of my thoughts about Napoleon is less than genuine'.<sup>28</sup> Specifying just what that difference might consist in, however, is notoriously hard, especially once structural indifference has been acknowledged. One option would be to appeal to what Bertrand Russell called 'belief-feeling',<sup>29</sup> the sense of certitude that pervades episodic (though not semantic) memory,<sup>30</sup> though it also seems possible to have episodic memories that lack this quality. With memories of early childhood in particular, it can be hard to be sure these are veridical and not mere fantasies.<sup>31</sup>

Wollheim claims that 'Every memory state comes labelled as such', containing within itself a thought to the effect that it depends causally upon some earlier experience in a way different to imagination or fantasy.<sup>32</sup> But structural indifference implies this 'label' cannot be found within the immediate visual contents of the memory. This being the case, what salient features of a memory distinguish it from a mere 'imagined seeing'? There have been two main families of responses to this question. The first set of responses claim that memories have some phenomenal property, over and above their sensory contents,<sup>33</sup> that is lacking in mere imagination. Let's call this the Phenomenal Property Approach. This approach has a surprisingly distinguished history. It's taken by William James, for example, who asserts that a certain 'warmth and intimacy' or 'animal heat' attaches to our personal memories but not the memories of others<sup>34</sup> (to which of course we can only have imaginative access, however vivid). Even Wollheim, who ultimately rejects the Phenomenal Property Approach, speaks of a 'sense of familiarity' invested in the remembered event.<sup>35</sup> These senses would amount to a phenomenal property of co-identity or ownership (perhaps related to what Heidegger called *Jemeinigkeit*, 'mineness', or what Dan Zahavi calls a quality of 'first-personal givenness'),<sup>36</sup> a sense that memories are *my* experiences in a way imagined scenes are not. The problem with the Phenomenal Property Approach has traditionally been that it is difficult to single out any phenomenal property—or in Wollheim's terms, any 'distinctive aspect of the subjectivity of mental states'—that will hold for *all* memories.<sup>37</sup> As James Giles puts

<sup>28</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.187.

<sup>29</sup> Russell 2009, p.237

<sup>30</sup> Tulving 1983, p.40.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Martin and Deutscher 1966, p.168.

<sup>32</sup> Wollheim 1989, p.118. Martin and Deutscher (1966, pp.167–8) offer a counterexample that suggests this is not the case: a painter is asked to paint what he takes to be a purely imaginary farm scene, but his parents then point out that he's actually just painted an actual farm he saw only once as a child. I think the answer here is simply to restrict the scope of what Wollheim is saying to experiences of episodic memory: the painter may be remembering a real place, and his memory depends upon a single, datable episode, but it's not clear that we'd call it an *experience* of episodic memory.

<sup>33</sup> Using 'sensory' as shorthand for the five classical senses plus others such as proprioception etc.

<sup>34</sup> James 1950, pp.331–6. Correspondingly, William Hazlitt (1805, p.40) also speaks of 'warmth of imagination' and 'greater liveliness and force' to explain the interest we take in our projected *future* selves.

<sup>35</sup> Wollheim 1989, p.118.

<sup>36</sup> Zahavi 2007, p.189.

<sup>37</sup> Wollheim 1989, p.118.

it, for whichever phenomenal quality of memory we nominate as the one that constitutes a sense of identity, 'it seems it will be easy enough to find a memory of an earlier self that does not have it, or a memory of another person which does have it'.<sup>38</sup> Even if it is not a necessary condition that *only* memories and *no other* states (e.g. imagining the past from some other person's perspective) would have such a property, it would be necessary that all memories *do* have such a quality—and that seems empirically dubious. The search for a distinctive 'memory affect' that holds for all memories thus looks very much like a non-starter. Let's assume, in fact, that this is correct: there is no distinctive phenomenal quality that is automatically encountered in each and every memory. As I'll argue below, that need not be the end of the story for the Phenomenal Property Approach. For the moment, though, we need to consider its main competition.

## Non-stipulation and Unselfconscious Memory

The second approach, that favoured by Wollheim and Velleman, is the inverse of the above: what labels memories as such is precisely the *absence* of something that *is* found in instances of imagined-seeing. Call this the Non-Stipulation Approach. Wollheim suggests that centrally imagining being someone else involves drawing on a certain psychological 'repertoire', a 'total body of desires, beliefs and emotions'.<sup>39</sup> If I imagine being Napoleon seeing Austerlitz, I must imagine the battlefield seen from the viewpoint of a victorious nineteenth-century megalomaniac. But, Wollheim notes, before I can draw upon Napoleon's 'repertoire' in this way, I must first 'select or assume it'.<sup>40</sup> I have to actively take on the psychological outlook of Napoleon first. And this is quite different to how I centrally imagine *myself* in a given context, where instead of having to assume a repertoire I always simply slip into it. Actively assuming a repertoire beforehand is thus a necessary feature of exercises of imagined seeing (at least where the identity of the notional subject is reasonably concrete) but is simply incompatible with episodic memory.

Velleman makes a closely related point,<sup>41</sup> but at greater length and more closely focused on the question of the relation between notional and actual subject, or what *connects* me as actual subject to the notional subject figured in genuinely self-reflexive images such as those of episodic memories, but *not* to the notional subjects of my imagined seeing. For Velleman, the question is not how the actual self insinuates itself into the image being 'seen' by the notional self in the imagining-being-Napoleon case, for it is clear that David Velleman is in no way figured in the image purportedly being 'seen' by Napoleon, even if David Velleman is the actual subject of this image. The notional subject tends to 'crowd out the actual subject as the target of

<sup>38</sup> Giles 1997, p.86.

<sup>39</sup> Wollheim 1989, p.87. Goldie (2000, pp.195, 198–201) prefers the term 'characterization'.

<sup>40</sup> Wollheim 1989, p.116.

<sup>41</sup> The connection is noted by Mackenzie 2007, p.279, n.12.

reflexive reference',<sup>42</sup> which expresses (in an equally metaphorical way) the same idea as structural indifference. Any 'I'-utterances the notional subject makes will refer to the notional subject, not the actual subject. The question then is how *that* subject comes to be identified *with Napoleon*? How does Napoleon, in Velleman's terms, 'get into the act' of a structurally indifferent image?

Velleman's answer is a prior stipulation of identity, akin to Wollheim's assumption of a personal repertoire. We centre the image on Napoleon more or less by fiat.<sup>43</sup> 'Without this referential stipulation, my mental image would not be a way of thinking about Napoleon as "me," and so it wouldn't be a way of imagining that I am Napoleon'.<sup>44</sup> And just as such assumptions are alien to memory, such stipulations are no less foreign to genuinely reflexive thoughts and images.<sup>45</sup> I don't need to specify *who* I am referring to when I say 'I', whereas if I am imagining being Napoleon I do need to make such a stipulation ('I, Napoleon, see Austerlitz').<sup>46</sup> Genuine memories pick out the actual subject as identical with the notional subject not stipulatively, but precisely by being 'unselfconscious about their reference, in that they require no other thought about who they refer to'.<sup>47</sup> It's traditionally claimed that memories cannot be mistaken about the identity of the subject who experienced them; Velleman's account implies that episodic memory can't misidentify the subject of the original experience 'only because it doesn't thereby identify him at all'.<sup>48</sup> And if there are no identity stipulations to be found in the sensory content of experiential memory, then 'Memory can thus succeed in making someone "me" to me even if he was Napoleon—not, of course, by making him the same person as me, but rather by presenting him to me in the notional first-person',<sup>49</sup> though we can then check this against the causal history of the image to determine whether it is accurate.<sup>50</sup>

Velleman speaks here of genuinely reflexive forms of visualization as providing the subject with 'access' to a 'first-person perspective' which they can occupy by virtue of a causal history that is not figured in the image itself. Underlying this claim is a distinction Velleman draws (and which we encountered in our discussion of Locke in Chapter 1) between personal identity as a metaphysical relation holding between persons at different times, and reflexivity as a psychological relation holding between subjects who can think of each other first-personally.<sup>51</sup> In this latter sense, memory 'recruits past selves for me, by putting them within reach of subjectively reflexive thought'.<sup>52</sup> Whether I fail to be *metaphysically* identical with Napoleon or not, I fail to be *perspectivally* identical because having to stipulate who the notional subject of

<sup>42</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.182.

<sup>43</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.188.

<sup>44</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.187. Smith (2006) makes much the same move using Peacocke's distinction between experiential and suppositional imagination. See also Recanati 2007, pp.203–7.

<sup>45</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.187.

<sup>46</sup> Wollheim (1989, p.116) makes a similar point about self-ascription.

<sup>47</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.188.

<sup>48</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.192.

<sup>49</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.192.

<sup>50</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.188.

<sup>51</sup> Velleman 2006a, pp.192–3.

<sup>52</sup> Velleman 2006a, pp.193.

my image of Austerlitz is rules it out of contention as a genuinely reflexive memory; 'I am not really on first-personal terms with Napoleon' but only pretend to be.<sup>53</sup>

The difficulty is that, insofar as Velleman wants perspectival access to do most of the work that personal identity was traditionally taken to do—secure egocentric concern and moral responsibility, ground our concern for survival, and so on<sup>54</sup>—then he needs to show that memory and projective imagination 'recruit' perspectivally available selves in more or less the same way. If memories are genuinely reflexive because they present a first-personal perspective with no extraneous identity stipulations, then we'd expect anticipatory imagination, if it is to preserve the same forms of concern we have regarding our past selves, to present our future selves in the same way. But memory and anticipation might not, in fact, determine the identity of the notional subject in the same way.<sup>55</sup> For one thing, if I visualize something that I plan or expect to do, the identity of the notional subject accompanying that anticipatory image would seem to be under my direct control—and that seems to render anticipatory imagination no different to other forms of imagined seeing, in that the identity of the notional subject has to be stipulated beforehand.<sup>56</sup>

Yet Velleman insists that some modes of anticipation are in fact 'unselfconscious' in the same way as memories, thereby placing the notional and actual subject of anticipatory images in a genuinely first-personal relation to each other. This serves, according to Velleman, to 'ground a distinction between real and imaginary future selves'.<sup>57</sup> Framing intentions, for instance, involves visualizing a future action in a way that always presents a notional subject, and which always presents that subject as 'me'.<sup>58</sup> Once again, the co-identity of this notional subject and the actual subject (the person doing the anticipating) is secured by the 'future causal history of the intention itself': 'the referent of "me" in the context is simply whoever fills the role of subject within that perspective'.<sup>59</sup>

One of the great merits of Velleman's position is that it turns an apparent weakness of episodic memory as a bearer of identity (namely, structural indifference) into a strength. The phenomenal 'unselfconsciousness' about identity that characterizes memory and anticipation, but not imagined seeing, coheres nicely with the lack of reference to the remembering/anticipating subject in the images such experiences present us with. Yet while Velleman is absolutely right to draw our attention to the non-reflective, immediate character of our experience of identity with remembered past selves and anticipated future selves, it can be argued that there is nonetheless some key *experiential* property of these experiences that distinguishes them from mere imagination, rather than it being the *absence* of anything additional that marks them out in this way.

<sup>53</sup> Velleman 2006a, pp.194.

<sup>54</sup> The literature on whether identity matters in survival is vast, but see e.g. Lewis 1983; Parfit 1984; Sosa 1990; Unger 1992; Martin 1998; Belzer, 2005; Johnston 2010.

<sup>55</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.195.

<sup>56</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.196.

<sup>57</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.196.

<sup>58</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.197.

<sup>59</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.198.



I've taken us into this stand-off between the Phenomenal Property Approach and the Non-Stipulation Approach at some length because, as I now hope to show, Kierkegaard comes down on the side of the Phenomenal Property Approach. Such a finding would tell us something important about Kierkegaard's understanding of selfhood, and in particular, fills out our understanding of what Kierkegaardian terms like 'choosing oneself' and 'the self relating to itself' might mean. Yet this is not a 'mere' historical finding—for Kierkegaard's version of this approach is intriguingly different from that envisioned in contemporary philosophy.

## Contemporaneity and the Notional and Actual Subject

In Chapter 2 we saw that the account of contemporaneity with Christ offered in *Philosophical Fragments* involves distinguishing between contemporaneity in the prosaic sense of historical co-location (a form of contemporaneity only available to those living in the same point in time as Christ) and another form of contemporaneity through 'seeing with the eyes of faith'—in effect a form of phenomenal co-presence with the event of the incarnation.<sup>60</sup> As both the historical contemporary (the contemporary<sub>i</sub>) and the follower at second hand are in the same position epistemically, it follows that this 'real' contemporary can either live in direct physical contact with Christ or live thousands of years later, without this affecting her ability to become contemporary in the higher sense. A sort of direct inspection of the event is made available to the modern-day believer, but conversely, the direct historical contemporary is *not* necessarily contemporaneous with the event of the incarnation in this eminent sense. It's *only* by seeing the envisioned events in a particular way that one becomes contemporary with them—and this applies, quite indifferently, to both direct sensory perception and imaginative reconstruction (and also memory, for Climacus also discusses the recollections of an historical contemporary after Jesus' death (PF, 65/SKS 4, 267)). Accordingly, with regard to this phenomenal form of contemporaneity we can no longer speak meaningfully of a 'follower at first hand' and 'follower at second hand' (PF, 103/SKS 4, 299)—the distinction loses its meaning when, phenomenally speaking, every believer is equally close to the events depicted in the New Testament.

When we put contemporaneity in these terms, it should begin to be apparent how this might relate to the question of how the notional and actual subjects of a visualization are connected: seeing 'with the eyes of faith' amounts to phenomenally collapsing the distinction between notional and actual subject. In phenomenal terms, the contemporary<sub>i</sub> is to the notional subject as the higher/phenomenal contemporary is to the actual subject; the question of how the believer at second hand can be *as*

<sup>60</sup> David J. Gouwens (1996, pp.134–5) notes that this 'event' increasingly takes on the form of an extended narrative, rather than just 'a bare historical "that" of "the moment" of Incarnation, an icon of eternity invading time'.

present with the incarnation as the contemporary<sub>t</sub> is isomorphic with the question of how the notional subject of memory or anticipation can be the same as the actual subject. In both cases, the question is what *unites* two perspectives.

*Samtidighed*, literally ‘same-time-ness’, can also be translated ‘simultaneity’, and this tells us something about the contemporaneous experience of an event like the incarnation: the believer experiences the event with a property of *direct presence*, experiencing it *as if it is happening right now*. A believer’s engagement with the incarnation has a property of being ‘right in front of’ them, whether their visual image of this event is primary (the believer at first hand) or secondary (the believer at second hand). But as the historical contemporary can *fail* to become phenomenally contemporary with such an event, this property of phenomenal contemporaneity cannot be a function of the sensory input or visual constitution of the experience. It has to be something phenomenal, but not sensory, that attends the image.

Contemporaneity of this sort thereby removes any question over whether the perspectives of the notional and actual subject are identical: if one encounters the incarnation with the property of phenomenal contemporaneity, the experience will be the same, in some salient respect, regardless of whether the follower is physically co-located with the event or imaginatively reconstructing it thousands of years later. But this crucially differs from imagined seeing in that, like memory, it is immediate and ‘unselfconscious’ in Velleman’s strictly cognitive sense: the later follower does not stipulate that she is some historical contemporary of Jesus’ standing at a specifiable distance from him as he speaks, nor does she imagine or believe that she is somehow causally connected to a person who lived two thousand years ago in Roman-occupied Judea, understood Aramaic, and so on. The actual subject of the image utters no identity-stipulative phrase equivalent to ‘I, Napoleon, see Austerlitz’, but nor is the fact that it is the subject *personally*—the *actual* subject—who is addressed elided from the experience. How is this possible? How does the *actual* subject ‘get into the act’ here?

The phenomenal ‘co-presence’ afforded by contemporaneity goes a long way towards answering this question. Whether we experience the event as an historical eyewitness or later follower, the outlandish event of a human being claiming to be God and offering personal salvation *demand*s a response, one way or the other, from the individual. As we’ve seen, both the historical contemporary and those who read their reports have the option of merely suspending judgement, or of paying lip service to the belief without fully and personally confronting what is really at issue in this belief-claim, but to do so is precisely *not* to become phenomenally contemporary with the event (PC, 41/SKS 12, 55). In the situation of phenomenal contemporaneity, we encounter this event, whether directly or through imagination, with the same urgency as an event occurring right before our eyes, one that speaks to us directly and personally and makes demands of us.

This answers a question we might have about how the *same* property of contemporaneity could be a feature of both episodic memory and anticipation on the one

hand, which involve apprehensions of events in our *own* lives, and events outside our own lives such as episodes in the life of Jesus on the other. This seems dangerously close to collapsing the distinction between remembering and imagining, though with the added complication that I'm not imagining *being* anyone in the scene I recreate in imagination. How can contemporaneity with *my own* past and future be the same, phenomenally speaking, with events that fall well outside my own experience, and in which I am in no way a participant? Anti-Climacus, at least, asserts explicitly that this is possible: 'Thus every human being is able to become contemporary only with the time in which he is living—and then with one more, with Christ's life upon earth, for Christ's life upon earth, the sacred history, stands alone by itself, outside history' (PC, 64/SKS 12, 76).

According to a viewpoint that has already posited the truth of Christian doctrine, one thing both events in my biological life and events in 'sacred history' such as the event of the incarnation have in common is that both have direct soteriological implications which I can choose to acknowledge or ignore. Accordingly, when I regard them with an (implicit) eye to my ultimate salvation, these events are experienced as addressing themselves *personally* to me as I am here-and-now. It's this quality of experiencing an event (whether directly perceived or imaginatively mediated) as issuing a *personal and direct demand upon the observer*, and not its sensory detail or realism, that gives the experience its quality of 'happening now', regardless of whether they are events in the biological life of the subject or certain events (here, events with soteriological significance for the subject) that fall outside it. Whereas we can normally view historical events from the outside, in the position of dispassionate observers—for history is structurally indifferent—events encountered in scripture have, for the believer, the property of engaging them personally, of being *about* them.

The net effect of this is to claim that where I regard some past event as making some sort of normative claim on me—as being something for which I am *responsible*, that for or to which I *am to respond*—I can experience it with a certain property that connects me as actual subject to the perspective of the notional subject figured in the image. This says nothing about the origin of that normativity (and therefore doesn't rule out mistaken beliefs about what we are and are not obligated by) but does, I hope, make it clear that it's the experience of this phenomenal property, not the fact of being normatively enjoined *per se*, that does the work of uniting the notional and actual subject here. The unity is a felt, subjective one, not an objective state of affairs, even if it does in fact track some objective set of facts.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> There is a certain unavoidable ambiguity here, insofar as contemporaneity centrally involves a sense of being 'claimed' by the event—a sense of having something *imposed* on us—while still being dependent upon our subjective engagement with the event; thus when we fail to experience this sense of being claimed, we are ourselves responsible for this failure. On these sorts of volitional ambiguities in Kierkegaard, see Ferreira 1991, pp.207–34; Stokes 2010a, pp.130–3.

Here I need to note a possible objection. Our discussion has centred on the question of co-presence with the (in Kierkegaard's view, uniquely privileged) historical event of the incarnation; but insofar as Anti-Climacus claims I can also become contemporary with events in my own life, this *same* property can also be a feature of standard episodic memories, not just imagined scenes from the distant past. In the previous chapter I asked whether contemporaneity is to be understood (as it sometimes has been) as a *purely* religious form of experience, or whether contemporaneity is a more general form of experience we can extend to specific religious objects. The suggestion that we can become contemporary only with the time in which one is living and with sacred history suggests the latter interpretation, but seems to leave open the possibility that we—like Johannes the Seducer—can't become phenomenally contemporary with events we are not living through *right now*, that is, with events in our remembered past and anticipated future. If that's correct, then the applicability of Kierkegaardian contemporaneity to the sort of problem Velleman, Parfit, and Wollheim are discussing falls apart.

However, as we saw in Chapter 1, for Kierkegaard, recollection (*erindringen*) is distinguished from memory by its essential, soteriological relation to the recollector. It is insofar as what I recollect pertains to my status as subject concerned for its ultimate salvation that this essential relation is constituted. In other words, in recollection, the raw 'stuff' of memory presents itself as pertaining essentially to the recollector; or to borrow the language of Anti-Climacus, it presents itself with a property of 'for-you-ness' to the recollector. It seems, therefore, to be a very reasonable reading of Kierkegaardian contemporaneity that it is indeed something that *can* be extended to episodic memory, and so a reasonable reading of Anti-Climacus's phrase 'the time in which [we are] living' (as the limits of what we can become contemporary with) as referring to one's *lifetime* rather than one's immediate present. (We then further need to delimit what one's 'lifetime' actually consists in, a problem which I'll discuss in Chapter 9).

On my reading, then, contemporaneity is not a property of purely religious experience, nor simply a (somewhat metaphorical) description of the epistemic situation of the religious believer, but a property of ordinary experience that applies when contemplating *any* situation that involves a sense that it concerns the contemplator directly and individually. The parallels with Lockean 'concernment' as the 'unavoidable concomitant' of consciousness should be obvious. Yet as the experience of Johannes the Seducer (who cannot reproduce the element of contemporaneity in his recollections of meetings with his soon-to-be latest conquest) shows, it is not *always* a feature of episodic memories. Accordingly it won't supply us with the 'memory affect'—a phenomenal property *always* present in memories and *always* absent from imagined-seeing—that we despaired of finding earlier. What this suggests is that whatever the causal accessibility of the perspective figured in some past remembered/imagined scene, on the phenomenal level the connection of the notional and actual subject in both memory and imagination is contingent. Whatever

we might say about the *metaphysical* basis of personal identity (which is not Kierkegaard's concern here), *phenomenal* identification with the past person is contingent upon an affective sense that the past deeds figured in memory are what the present self is *responsible for*. Whilst it may be the case that imagined scenes and memory feel different in other respects, this is not what makes them reflexive: their reflexivity comes from my feeling myself responsible for them by envisaging them as making a direct demand upon me, as if they were happening for-me-right-now.

## Observer Memories and False Memories

Shifting the locus of reflexivity in this way, such that imagined images can also have the property of reflexivity regardless of their causal history, actually helps in dealing with puzzles about the perspectival accessibility of acentrally remembered events. To return to a topic mentioned earlier, observer memories, where we envision ourselves from the outside—as an object *within* the visual field rather than merely implied by its perspectival organization—are surprisingly common.<sup>62</sup> If episodic memories are veridical copies of past experiences, observer memories are puzzling, as we obviously can't have originally observed ourselves from the outside in this way; yet while there appear to be experimentally discernible differences in their emotional content and the salience of recalled details, for all intents and purposes these are genuine memories. They are also generally unselfconscious in Velleman's sense. But if we make contemporaneity the key to reflexivity, this problem disappears. If I visually remember an event with the subjective *phenomenal* property of being personally responsible for it (whatever the source and scope of that responsibility), it does not matter whether the physical perspective from which the event is presented as having been recorded<sup>63</sup> is one that could have been physically available to me or not. Moreover, we can imaginatively experience past actions we have no recollection of (due to age, amnesia, intoxication, etc.) as being the deeds of selves we are on genuinely first-personal terms with,<sup>64</sup> precisely because we see them as deeds *we* are answerable for. To lack that (non-thematized) sense that the experience I remember falls within my *field of answerability*, as *concerning* me in that way, is tantamount to mere imagined seeing—even when I am nonetheless related to the image via the normal causal mechanisms of memory.

<sup>62</sup> See Nigro and Neisser 1983; Robinson and Swanson 1993; McIsaac and Eich 2002; Debus 2007; Sutton 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Writers on memory increasingly insist that memories are more like ongoing reconstructions than recordings, but we should also note that a memory needn't be thought of as a simple recording for it to present itself *as being* a recording.

<sup>64</sup> Which, per Goldie, we do: 'My contention is that diverse kinds of remembering of one's past characteristically get pulled together in autobiographical narrative remembering—semantic memories, all sorts of experiential memories, traces of thought and imagination, fragments of "flashbulb" memory, almost dreamlike sequences that flit through one's mind from time to time, perhaps many of them hardly reaching a level of conscious awareness, and much else besides' (Goldie 2012, p.44).

In Chapter 1 we saw that Locke's model of identity throws up problems of moral imputability for actions we have forgotten. Locke found no satisfactory answer to the imputability problem, though as we saw, given the pragmatic focus of his discussion, he may not have needed one anyway. But perhaps here we can see an answer emerging, at least in vague outline: if I can imagine the past deed with a phenomenal sense of it as something for which I am responsible, then it is genuinely *perspectivally* recruited to me (whatever the *metaphysical* facts of identity turn out to be). Thoughts about this past event are as genuinely reflexive as standard memories are taken to be *if* the same property of normative for-me-ness is present in them. Yet this seems, troublingly, to rule out the possibility of false memories, which despite Locke's assurances about what will happen on judgement day clearly do occur to us here and now. Locke notoriously insists that if I can remember Noah's flood, then I *am* the person who saw the flood<sup>65</sup>—a claim which looks like a *reductio ad absurdum* of the memory criterion for personal identity, unless I can tell some bizarre story that links me causally to someone living thousands of years ago. But if we want to insist that I am not *really* the person who saw the flood then it seems we're back to insisting that there's a metaphysical story about what we *really* are and that our phenomenal sense of identity is secondary and derivative. Metaphysics, it seems, is back in the driving seat.

To anticipate the next few chapters somewhat, we have two separate senses of identity: a phenomenal sense of ourselves as a present-tense subject, and a cognitive awareness of the diachronically extended human being that we are. I've argued elsewhere that we can accept this distinction between our 'from-the-inside' sense of identity and our third-personal conception of the careers of the human animal that each of us is without insisting one of these is what we *really* are and the other merely secondary or derivative.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, I think resisting the standing temptation to collapse phenomenal and metaphysical judgements of identity or non-identity into one common account—which will in effect mean making one decisive and the other subordinate, and it's pretty much always metaphysics that comes out on top—is one of the most important things Kierkegaard has to teach us. But false memories may seem to present an insurmountable challenge to this view. Unless we want to bite Locke's bullet and accept that I *just am* the person who saw the flood, it seems we have to privilege metaphysical identity over phenomenal identity. It doesn't matter how strong my sense that I saw the flood might be: I'm wrong, because I wasn't there.

But this challenge is lessened somewhat if we take it that metaphysical and phenomenal senses of self, though separate (as our discussion of alienation in Chapter 5 in particular will show) nonetheless interact with, impact upon, and modify each other. There are straightforward ways in which my sense of self can be altered when I am presented with facts that appear to contradict my memory.

<sup>65</sup> Locke 1975, pp.340–1.

<sup>66</sup> Stokes 2013b, 2014.

I can be persuaded that despite my indignant denials and complete lack of recall, I *did* drunkenly belt out ‘The Safety Dance’ at karaoke last night, and I can be persuaded that despite my apparent memory I *couldn’t possibly* have been present for an event that happened years before my birth. In such cases the quality of the rememberer’s self-experience alters: what had seemed like a *memory* of Noah’s flood now comes to seem like a mere imagined-seeing of the flood, despite there being no alteration in its visual content. The imagery is the same, but it lacks a sense that what is depicted falls within my field of answerability. Or, we might be stuck with a sense of being troubled by the origin of the imagery: did I just imagine that flood? Or am I actually remembering a film I saw about a flood, or a dream, or some different event I’ve misinterpreted as a flood when remembering it?

It should be no surprise that the sorts of things we appeal to in constructing metaphysical accounts of personal identity, such as psychological and physical continuity, impact upon the subjective quality of our experience in this way. I’ve tied the subjective sense of identity to a sense of responsibility for the selves we remember and imagine, and claimed our sense of responsibility is indexed to a sense of a *life* for which we are uniquely responsible. Metaphysics may not yield one clear picture of exactly what that life does and does not contain, but the sorts of continuity it makes use of do feed into our subjective sense of self. The pictures you’ve taken on your phone of my karaoke antics will change my relation to a segment of my past (by making me suddenly identify, cringingly, with the dreadful singer presented in the photos), but if I don’t remember what’s depicted, then it is the photo’s status as evidence of bodily continuity between drunk-singer-last-night and hungover-non-rememberer-today that effects this change, by presenting me with a ‘candidate’ self that I can’t declaim identity with.

That might look once again like metaphysical identity taking priority. But the influence can arguably move in the other direction too. To take a well-worn example: many philosophers regard *Star Trek*-style teleportation as a form of suicide, as most metaphysically realist accounts of personal identity (both neo-Lockean and physicalist/animalist) imply that the relevant self-constituting forms of continuity don’t hold between the pre-teleportation person and the post-teleportation person. But as Mark Johnston has argued,<sup>67</sup> if we lived in a society in which teleportation is commonplace, we might come to see our teleportation products *as us*, envisioning their actions as things we are answerable for and extending our egocentric concern to them in the same way we would with regular survival. In such cases, instead of our egocentric and practical concerns being guided by metaphysics, our metaphysical commitments (of the form ‘x is identical with y’) are being directed by our practical and moral concerns. Admittedly this point needs to be developed further, and this isn’t the place to do it. But there is at least some reason to think that the interaction between

<sup>67</sup> Johnston 2010.

phenomenal identity and metaphysical identity is two-way, in a way that licences us in refusing a strict hierarchicalization between them.

As we've seen, for Locke the false memory problem was 'fatally' urgent, for on the standard interpretation of Locke as a memory criterion theorist, the 'correction' of false memories implies another, *truer* account of our identity that is not available to us but which will be available to God on the Day of Judgement. But we've also seen that the theological pragmatist reading takes the heat out of this objection, because Locke arguably isn't trying to offer *the* definitive account of what we are, but *an* account that's good enough for now. We 'recruit' past selves via our concerned remembering, but we remain open to the possibility that this sense of self may come to be altered at a future time and in light of future disclosures.

It's worth reminding ourselves though that Kierkegaardian contemporaneity is in some ways more extreme: not only can I recruit perspectival images to myself to which I have a problematized relationship, such as observer memories or seeing photos of events I've forgotten, I can recruit the subject of past events that I was clearly not physically co-located with *at all*. The incarnation is the obvious example, while the young aesthete 'A' suggests we could similarly become 'present' with events in the Middle Ages, should they acquire 'decisive reality' for us (EO, 1:224/SKS 2, 218). In such a case, the subject would be co-present with visualized long-ago events because she would experience them with the phenomenal sense that they make demands of her as she is here and now. We could, moreover, include events for which I bear agential responsibility despite not being physically present: if I was the person who betrayed Anne Frank and her family to the Nazis, I could imagine their deaths, scattered across different times and places, as events *in my life* understood as the life I am to answer for. These may not, strictly speaking, be events within the spatio-temporal history of my body, but they might, in the normative sense discussed here, fall within a perspective with which I can still be on first-personal terms. And this leads us to the broader question of the relation between contemporaneity and imagination *per se*.

## Anticipatory Imagination

It is a pervasive claim throughout Kierkegaard's work that certain forms of self-reflexive thought or vision involve seeing oneself *within* remembered and projected scenarios.<sup>68</sup> In the account of moral imagination offered by Anti-Climacus we find a persistent concern for the importance of recognizing ourselves in representations of our projected future actions, seeing 'oneself' in the 'mirror of possibility' instead of seeing only a human being (SUD, 37/SKS 11, 152). But what might it mean to see

<sup>68</sup> As discussed in Part II of Stokes 2010a.



oneself as the person who carries out the intentions I frame in projective imagination?

For Velleman, as we've seen, framing an intention (or simply anticipating the future), in visual forms at least, involves experiencing the notional subject of the image of the future we project as first-personally-accessible by virtue of the image's causal history rather than any extraneous stipulations. We *don't* stipulate the identity of the person who 'turns up' to fill the position; he is 'simply the person who will confront the envisioned future with this image at his back', his identity 'picked out by the natural history of the image, as the person whom it presents in the notional first-person'.<sup>69</sup> But there is nonetheless something distinctive about these modes of anticipatory imagination when compared to, say, simply visualizing some future event: in both cases we do not stipulate the identity of the notional subject, but our way of anticipating colours how the future will eventually be experienced. 'I don't just anticipate experiencing the future; I anticipate experiencing it as the payoff of this anticipation, as the cadence resolving the present, anticipatory phrase of thought'.<sup>70</sup> I cannot, for instance, anticipate being shocked by an event that I'm already anticipating.<sup>71</sup> It's because of these forms of 'intercommunication' between the notional and actual perspective that I care more about what I anticipate happening to me than to others: to imagine the future event 'befalling a mind that has somehow been prepared' by precisely this anticipation, is to be 'caught up in it' in a way that 'to some degree, already constitutes [the event's] mattering'.<sup>72</sup>

What Kierkegaard brings to this sort of discussion, however, is an awareness that there are different ways of imagining a causally connected first-person perspective, some of which contain a sense of identity and some of which do not—even when the causal-connectedness of the two perspectives is not in question. There are, for instance, ways in which we can imagine future actions that are strongly connected or contiguous with the circumstances of our lives right now, and which we frame specifically as intentions, and yet which we do not fully inhabit in an important sense. In his discussion of imagination and agency, Anti-Climacus casts the possible courses of action we present to ourselves in terms of a 'mirror' that shows us selves to which we bear a rather curious modal relationship:

The mirror of possibility is no ordinary mirror; it must be used with extreme caution, for, in the highest sense, this mirror does not tell the truth. That a self appears to be such and such in the possibility of itself is only a half-truth, for in the possibility of itself the self is still far from or is only half of itself. (SUD, 37/SKS 11, 152)

<sup>69</sup> Velleman 2006a, pp.198–9.

<sup>70</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.198.

<sup>71</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.199. An anonymous referee points out that Velleman's claim doesn't quite seem right here: I can anticipate an event that I expect I'll have forgotten anticipating by the time it happens, such that I'll be shocked when it does.

<sup>72</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.199; see also Velleman 2008.

The selves presented in anticipatory or intention-framing imagination are, truistically, selves that have realized (or are in the process of realizing) possibilities that have not yet *in fact* been realized. But for Anti-Climacus, what's at issue here is not just the causal history by which the prefigured intention comes to be realized, but the particular way in which we see the selves we encounter in projective imagination: '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).

It is clearly not a feature of projective imagination that we sometimes have to work out reflectively whether it is *us* involved in the projected scenario—that's simply given in the experience of anticipation or framing an intention. That, after all, is one of the unassailable strengths of Velleman's account: there are no overt cognitions of the sort 'and that will be me', just as no comparable overt thoughts attend memory. Velleman and Anti-Climacus agree, I think, that we have an immediate relationship to the selves so figured, without any cognitive stipulations. To that extent, Anti-Climacus could probably go along with the claim that purely imaginary exercises such as imagining being Napoleon seeing Austerlitz are not genuinely self-reflexive. But what Anti-Climacus takes genuine self-reflexivity to consist in is a mode of experience that forms a *phenomenal* connection between the present and future perspectives. Like recognition—an essentially perceptual experience in which we suddenly see something *as* what we recognize it to be—this amounts to seeing a future perspective *as mine* in some phenomenally decisive sense, in a way that is not necessarily determined by (but perhaps responds to) causal facts about which human it belongs to.

Conversely, we can frame intentions or anticipate possibilities *without* experiencing a sense of phenomenal identification with the self figured in those possibilities. Consider someone who decides that someday soon she is going to give away all her possessions, move to an isolated spot in the countryside, and live a life of rustic simplicity and sustainability. She envisions, often and in exquisite detail, how she will cast off the trappings of modern life, how she'll deal with the responses of her family and friends when she does, and what her bucolic life will be like. She tells anyone who'll listen about the move she's 'planning'. But—and here's why the scare quotes around 'planning' seem justified—weeks, months, and years pass, and the move to the country never happens. It remains always off in the 'someday soon', continually planned for but never actually carried out. I suspect many of our most treasured hopes and dreams are more like this than we'd care to admit.

What can we say about our would-be latter-day Thoreau's relation to this intention? She isn't straightforwardly akratic, and it seems too hasty to claim that she doesn't *honestly* intend to realize her plan. But we can have serious misgivings as to whether she *seriously* holds this intention—she frames it as a genuine intention, and imagines a human being causally connected with herself turning up to carry this intention out, but she does not experience a phenomenal sense that *she*, the self she experiences herself as being right now, is enjoined to take action to this end. Without

the sense that this possibility speaks to her personally as presenting what she, here and now, is to bring about, the intention degrades into mere reverie or fantasy. The future scenario appears not as a *task*, but as a mere diversion, a plaything. As the jaded A notes in *Either/Or*, possibility is an intoxicant that, unlike pleasure itself, never disappoints (EO, 1:26/SKS 2, 50). As cases like this show, we can indulge in such fantasies while insisting that we are seriously and soberly framing intentions, all the while quarantining ourselves from the implications of what we envision. In such reveries we ‘transmute’, as Catriona Mackenzie puts it, from centrally imagining being me (the actual subject) to imagining from the notional first-person perspective of a person I’d *like* to be—but unlike in the example Mackenzie cites (of a timid child imagining standing up to bullies in ways inconsistent with her actual personality), the distance between the notional and actual perspectives is constituted by a lack of reflexive identification rather than an awareness of dispositional difference.<sup>73</sup> In such cases we do not, as Anti-Climacus puts it, see *ourselves* in the mirror but only a human being—even though it is clear that, on Anti-Climacus’ account, we don’t see it as *another* human being. In other words, we acknowledge our co-identity with the *human* figured in the scenario we imagine, but we do not see this as being the same *self*. (This distinction will become crucial in the following chapters.) We fail to ‘occupy’ the position of the notional subject of the projected experience, without any awareness that we are doing so.

## Fission Cases

The differences between the Non-Stipulation Approach and Kierkegaard’s distinctive version of the Phenomenal Property Approach becomes clear when Velleman turns his attention to another example of a split between causal history and perspectival accessibility: the human fission thought-experiment so beloved of philosophers of personal identity. (That’s hardly an exaggeration: in *Reasons and Persons*, the book that has done more to shape personal identity discussions than any other since Locke, Parfit mentions that David Wiggins’ presentation of the fission problem was almost entirely responsible for his decision to study philosophy.)<sup>74</sup> Suppose I know that tomorrow I will split into two complete human beings, like an amoeba—or instead, that my brain will be bisected into its constituent hemispheres, each of which, fully capable of sustaining my complete psychology, will then be transplanted into identical twin bodies. Each of the resulting persons will be psychologically continuous with the person I am now. Such thought-experiments play havoc with the idea that psychological continuity is what constitutes personal identity, at least where identity

<sup>73</sup> Mackenzie 2008b, p.127.

<sup>74</sup> Parfit 1984, p.518, n.40. Wiggins’ account of the fission problem is to be found in Wiggins 1967, p.50. In fact, embryonic versions of the fission example can be found as early as Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins’s debate over Locke between 1706 and 1709. See Martin and Barresi 2000, pp.33–8.

is understood as a transitive, one-to-one logical relation. For if the two 'fission products' are each perfectly psychologically continuous with the pre-fission person (at least momentarily), what sorts of identity relations hold here? The pre-fission person can't be identical with both fission products, as the transitivity of the identity relation would then require that the fission products also be identical with each other, which they clearly aren't. Yet equally we have no non-arbitrary grounds on which to declare the pre-fission person to be identical with one of the fission products but not the other, for the fission products are both equally continuous with the pre-fission self; there is, in Nozick's phrase, no 'closest continuer' of the pre-fission self, for both post-fission selves are equally close.<sup>75</sup>

It seems that the pre-fission person simply ceases to exist here—yet as Parfit notes, this clearly isn't as bad as normal death, and indeed might even be slightly better than normal survival.<sup>76</sup> If I'm psychologically continuous with my fission products, shouldn't I still be able to anticipate the things that will happen to them? There may be practical limits to how *many* future perspectives we can anticipate, for having several fission descendants may rob us of what Peter Unger calls, somewhat obliquely, 'the focus of a person's life',<sup>77</sup> and as Raymond Martin claims, 'as a matter of contingent fact, few of us can easily project ourselves into what we imagine will be the psychologies of more than one simultaneously conscious fission descendant'.<sup>78</sup> Yet on the assumption that at least some of us, at least some of the time, could so project ourselves, what would this look like? What would it be like to anticipate the experiences of more than one self, or (pre-fission) frame intentions for my fission products to carry out in the future?

According to Velleman I *can* frame such intentions—but not in a genuinely reflexive manner, because I could not imagine these future actions being carried out without first specifying which of my fission products' perspective I am imagining:

If I try to picture the moment as it will appear in an experience specified merely as forthcoming, or to follow, I won't succeed in picking out the perspective from which I'm trying to picture it, since my picture may be followed, in the relevant sense, by two different experiences of the moment in question, and I cannot be trying to draw it from both perspectives at once. Similarly, my anticipation may be remembered in two different perspectives, and so I cannot frame it from a perspective specified merely as that in which it will be remembered.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> As discussed in Nozick 1983, pp.29–69.

<sup>76</sup> Parfit *Reasons and Persons* pp.264–5.

<sup>77</sup> Unger 1992, p.269. In fact Unger says we lose too much of this focus even with *two* fission descendants. It's not that we lose *more* focus when we fission into a hundred people rather than two, but simply that the loss is more obvious in cases of 'century fission'; the loss is just easier to overlook when there are only two fission products.

<sup>78</sup> Martin 1998, p.67. Barry Dainton (2008, p.13) also claims that in a situation where thousands of perfect (physical and psychological) copies of you are made, these are, intuitively, *mere* copies whose fates don't engender your egocentric concern regarding their future welfare.

<sup>79</sup> Velleman 2006a, pp.200–1.

Since I cannot unselfconsciously (i.e. without identity-stipulation) imagine the action that I intend to carry out, fission would deprive me of the basis on which I can become genuinely first-personal with my fission products. Fission does, therefore, deprive me of future selves, even in the perspectivally accessible rather than metaphysical sense.<sup>80</sup> There would exist no perspective which I could imaginatively enter 'without a second thought'—and 'the second thought of whose perspective I was entering would be an alienating thought, one too many for the intimacy that holds among selves'.<sup>81</sup> So in fission cases, I lose my future,<sup>82</sup> in the sense that there no longer exists a future I can unselfconsciously anticipate as mine.<sup>83</sup>

Human fission seems like the sort of abstract philosopher's daydream that Kierkegaard would want absolutely nothing to do with. Still, even here Kierkegaardian contemporaneity might be of use to philosophers, even if it's not an application of the idea that Kierkegaard, with his overriding existential and religious concerns, would approve of. What follows, just to be clear, is a (somewhat speculative) use of one of Kierkegaard's *concepts*, but it's certainly not a *Kierkegaardian use* of that concept.

Contemporaneity, as we've seen, can make a person phenomenally present with events which they could not possibly have been physically present at. If we claim that the same property is at work when forward-directed anticipations are genuinely reflexive, then the perspectives of our fission products could once again be made accessible to us. In imagining an action carried out by one of my future fission products, so long as I can experience what I imagine as something *I now* am answerable for, then the distinction between the notional and actual self is cancelled out. Contemporaneity connects me in the required way with what I anticipate that

<sup>80</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.201. For an interesting objection to Velleman's argument, see Shipley 2002; see also Belzer 2005.

<sup>81</sup> Velleman 2006a, p.202. My present perspective will still, however, be unselfconsciously accessible to my post-fission products; perspectival identity can therefore be asymmetrical in a way that human-being-identity cannot, which shows, according to Velleman, that metaphysical person-identity cannot coincide with perspectival selfhood (2006a, p.201, n.53).

<sup>82</sup> An anonymous referee points out that this may not be the case if the fission products are never conscious at the same time, as in Martin's (1998, pp.53–72) 'fission rejuvenation' example. In fission rejuvenation, one of the fission products *A* is unconscious from the moment of fission, and placed into a state of biological stasis, while the other fission product *B* continues to live a life psychologically continuous with that of the pre-fission self. A device in *B*'s brain continually transmits information about *B*'s brain-states to a device inside *A*'s brain. When *B* dies (say of a heart attack), the device in his brain sends a signal to the device in *A*'s brain that wakes *A* up. *A* will be psychologically continuous with *B* as *B* was at the moment of death, and physically continuous with the pre-fission person as they were at the point of fission. Subjectively, *A* will have the experience of having just had a heart attack and then waking up having instantly reversed the aging process back to where he was when he fissioned.

<sup>83</sup> Of course, someone like Parfit could claim that this 'loss' isn't something that should bother us. Velleman has challenged the rationality of Parfit's general equanimity about survival: 'I don't see why bearing a less robust relation to his own past and future is any consolation to Parfit. Why should a sense of partial alienation from past and future selves leave him feeling relieved rather than bereft? It's not as if he has come to realize that this isn't his "only life"; he has merely come to realize that it isn't even *his* in the sense that he previously thought. This realization provides only the cold comfort of having nothing to lose' (Velleman 2006b, p.15).

fission product doing. That I can then imagine a *separate* action, carried out by the *other* fission product, does not necessarily add an extra layer of stipulation to the process: I simply imagine one scenario with the property of being contemporary with it, then the other. Each thought can be attended by the appropriate phenomenal property—contemporaneity—independently of each other. This would certainly be an unfamiliar form of anticipation, though as Parfit points out, just because a form of anticipation seems unimaginable to us *now* doesn't make it impossible.<sup>84</sup>

It might be objected here that in fission cases, contemporaneity would be even *more* removed from normal anticipation than the forms of stipulative anticipation Velleman describes. To become contemporaneous with events seen from a future perspective, I have to see that perspective as one for which I am *responsible*; doesn't adding this normative dimension add a reflective layer to the question of whether I can, quite simply, fear or look forward to something that will happen to one of my fission products? If I'm told that after I undergo fission, one of the fission products will be subjected to hideous torture, do I really need to feel some sense of moral responsibility—let alone *soteriological* responsibility—for the hapless torture victim? Put differently, is contemporaneity really a candidate for the property that distinguishes self-regarding fear of being tortured myself from other-regarding fear of someone else being tortured?

That is, I think, one of the most serious objections to using *samtidighed* in the context of personal identity.<sup>85</sup> Part of the answer will consist in describing how, for Kierkegaard, contemporaneity is not simply how we *normally* anticipate the future, but is a normatively enjoined state to be achieved that uses the same psychological materials as normal anticipation. Just as *erindringen* uses the raw 'stuff' of *hukommelse* to fashion an exercise of memory that relates *essentially* to the rememberer, so too contemporaneity uses both episodic memory and anticipatory imagination to generate a mode of recollection and anticipation that is suffused with a sense of soteriological-identity-tracking responsibility. And this gives contemporaneity a certain immunity to the sense of alienation from our distant past and distant future that 'basic' memory or anticipation is otherwise prone to. (We'll discuss such self-alienation in Chapter 5).

The merit of the Kierkegaardian version of the Phenomenal Property Approach to the question of what links us with our first-personally accessible past and future perspectives is that it allows for the gap that is sometimes experienced between the causal and phenomenal accessibility of our memories and projected futures. An account such as Velleman's that claims that an unselfconscious causal history provides the sort of perspectival access that underpins egocentric concern will

<sup>84</sup> Parfit 1984, p.174.

<sup>85</sup> It's an objection that was first raised to me by Ed Langerak in a seminar at St Olaf College in 2007; Martin (1998, p.102) makes a similar point. I try to answer it in several different ways across this book; whether successfully or not is for the reader to judge, but I'd like to record my gratitude to Ed for raising it.

struggle with cases where such access is taken as given but egocentric concern fails to hold. We'll have more to say about that in the following Chapters 4 and 5. For the moment, it's enough to note that Kierkegaardian contemporaneity has furnished us with an account of how the notional and actual subjects of memories and of anticipatory imagination are linked. But does *this* account have more to recommend it than the Non-Stipulation Approach? In Chapters 4 and 5 I hope to show that contemporaneity, precisely by virtue of its robustly normative dimension, connects in important ways with our sense of what we *care* about in identity, in ways that go beyond what the Non-Stipulation Approach can offer.

## 4

# Diachronicity, Episodicity, Synchronicity

## The Self across Time

We've now seen that Kierkegaard belongs to a tradition that regards a certain phenomenal property as essential to the experience of putatively identity-tracking features of memory and anticipation. Our sense that the events we remember or anticipate matters to us uniquely, in a way that amounts to our having a *sense of being identical* with the selves that had or will have those experiences, depends upon normatively laden *sense of responsibility* for those events—and not, as we might assume, the other way around. This sense of responsibility presents itself as a sort of phenomenal co-presence with the events, such that the distinction between the perspective of the original experiencer of a memory (or the imagined experiencer of a future event) and the perspective of the present subject collapses, at least on a phenomenal level. Of course, we know that these events *are* temporally distant from us—that's a key part of the difference between remembering and hallucinating.<sup>1</sup> Does this mean, then, that it's Kierkegaardian contemporaneity that accounts for our sense of *having been in the past*, our sense of having diachronic extension across time? And if so, given that contemporaneity is something we're supposed to achieve, doesn't that mean that we might sometimes *fail* to have a sense of diachronic extension? The possibility of subjects having memories yet lacking a sense of diachronic extension seems, at first blush, so unlikely as to count against the thesis that our sense of diachronic extension is a function of *samtidighed*. Certainly Locke, who saw concernment as an 'unavoidable concomitant' of consciousness, doesn't seem to have anticipated such a possibility.

Yet the idea of subjects who have memories and anticipations yet lack a sense of their *self* as something that persists through time, something that existed in the past and will exist in the future, has been defended at length by Galen Strawson—who, compellingly, claims to be such a subject himself. Across a number of heavily discussed works, Strawson has articulated a number of important and challenging

<sup>1</sup> As claimed by Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, p.79.



claims about the phenomenology<sup>2</sup> of self-experience. As I hope the extensive engagement that follows would attest, despite my deep disagreements with aspects of Strawson's account of self-experience I think there is much in it that is also importantly right and deeply valuable. And Strawson's work has been one of the key catalysts for discussions of self-experience in recent years, due largely to the provocative character of his central claims: that our experience contains a phenomenal 'sense of self', a self that is figured in experience as a single mental thing that is a subject of experience; that this self is a physical object (which Strawson sees as entailed by any form of materialism worthy of the name); that my sense of the temporal persistence of my *self* (again, understood as a mental thing) is quite distinct from my sense of my long-term continuity *as a human being*; that due to the saccadic, 'jumpy' nature of consciousness, this self is always (though contingently) short-lived; and that accordingly, human beings do not have *one* self throughout their lives but a succession of countless selves of only momentary duration.<sup>3</sup> This position is challenging both to neo-Lockeans who want to preserve the concept of the self as a psychological entity that is co-extensive with most or all of an individual human animal's life, and to those who seek to emphasize the embodied, enactive, and environmental aspects of selfhood.<sup>4</sup> For the latter group—currently very much in the ascendant—Strawson's selves are too ghostly, too Cartesian, while for the former group, they're simply too short-lived to do the work the concept 'self' is expected (or hoped) to do.

A parallel claim in these works concerns different ways in which the self's temporal dimensions are experienced. 'One can,' according to Strawson, 'be fully cognizant of the fact that one has long-term continuity as a human being without *ipso facto* having any significant sense or experience-structuring conception of the self as something that has long-term continuity.'<sup>5</sup> Some people, according to Strawson, are 'Diachronics' or 'Endurantists', who experience their selves as things that extend/persist across time, while others are 'Episodics' or 'Impermanetists', with no sense of their selves as existing outside of the present moment.<sup>6</sup> Strawson's stated aims are modest: he claims merely to defend episodic self-experience as no less rich or fully moral than diachronic self-experience. He doesn't set out to commend episodicity *over* diachronicity (though he is more critical of narrativity). Yet ultimately his account makes it hard to see in what diachronic experience could possibly consist

<sup>2</sup> For a critique of Strawson's claim to be engaging in phenomenology, see Sheets-Johnstone 1999; for a defence of Strawson's approach, see Brook 1999.

<sup>3</sup> These claims are made across Strawson 1999, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2011b.

<sup>4</sup> Strawson 2009, p.23. <sup>5</sup> Strawson 2009, p.202.

<sup>6</sup> Strawson 2003, pp.109–10; 2004, p.430 *passim*; 2009, pp.221–2. 'Endurantist' and 'Impermanetist' are Strawson's newer terms, meant to reduce confusion between the adjective and noun forms of 'diachronic' and 'episodic' (though in his 2011b he simply uses 'diachronic' and 'non-diachronic'). However, 'Episodic' and 'Diachronic' have become quite firmly embedded in discussions of Strawson, and so despite the potential for confusion I'll stick with the older terms here. I'm using capitals to pick out the noun form (i.e. Diachronic and Episodic persons), with lower-case for the adjective.

other than an artefact of our awareness of ourselves as mere human beings.<sup>7</sup> Our phenomenal sense that we persist across time is an illusion engendered by ‘resemblances of content among successive experiences . . . deep similarities and constancies of general mental feeling-tone’ and ‘constancies and coherences of development of perceptual and cognitive content from experience to experience as we move around in the world and think our thoughts’.<sup>8</sup>

One could claim that Strawson’s argument suffers for this lack of a phenomenology of diachronic self-experience that doesn’t ‘delimn when scrutinized’.<sup>9</sup> On this line, Strawson needs a non-reductive account of whatever is distinctive about the diachronic life if he’s to maintain that there are no epistemological or moral grounds for privileging either diachronicity or episodicity—and it’s not enough simply to assume that such an account must be possible. Call this the *Strong Lack Argument*. But even if we assume, more charitably, that Strawson *doesn’t* need to provide a non-reductive account of diachronicity to maintain his neutrality between episodic and diachronic existence, the fact remains that there’s still a gap in the picture that we may reasonably want to fill. Call this the *Weak Lack Argument*. Either the Strong or the Weak Lack Arguments are sufficient to motivate the search for a phenomenology of Diachronic self-experience to correspond to Strawson’s descriptions of episodicity. As Strawson, a self-declared Episodic, may not be in a position to provide such a phenomenology, we will need to look elsewhere to find it.

In what follows, I do not claim to offer the definitive phenomenology of diachronicity. I will argue, however, that Kierkegaardian contemporaneity, in the Phenomenal Property Approach interpretation of the term we’ve been developing here, stands as perhaps the best picture yet offered of what diachronic self-experience consists in. Kierkegaard furnishes us with a philosophically structured description of what it is like to experience a phenomenally rich sense of co-identity with representations of one’s past and future selves—precisely the robust phenomenology of diachronic self-experience Strawson’s account lacks. We’ll see that in this context there are at least two distinct advantages to adopting *samtidighed* as our model of diachronic self-experience. First, its normative character serves to ground the frequently voiced suspicion that there *is* something incomplete, inadequate, or morally deficient about a purely episodic experience of self, especially with regard to the availability or otherwise of morally valuable self-reflexive emotions. Secondly, the Kierkegaardian model offers a more parsimonious explanation than Strawson provides of why even Episodics fear the future, especially death.

Yet a morally normative account of diachronicity, such as we get from contemporaneity, implicitly critiques the very episodic modes of self-experience that Strawson seeks to defend. On the Strong Lack Argument, this means the encounter with Kierkegaard confronts Strawsonians with a fairly stark choice: either articulate

<sup>7</sup> Davenport (2012, pp.24, 26) basically endorses this criticism of Strawson.

<sup>8</sup> Strawson 2009, pp.218–19; see also 2003, p.357.

<sup>9</sup> Strawson 2003, p.355.

another, normatively neutral but nonetheless robust phenomenology of diachronicity, or take on the Kierkegaardian account of what it is to be diachronic and abandon their neutrality about the diachronic–episodic distinction. In the latter case, there are only two moves left open: dismiss diachronicity as illusory, or accept it as normative. In other words, if Strawsonians cannot provide a better account of diachronicity, they will have to endorse one or the other mode of experience. Fence-sitting, as it turns out, is not an option. If, however, we stick to the Weak Lack Argument, the Kierkegaardian position still poses a challenge to Strawson’s claim that episodicity is no worse than diachronicity.

The main lines of the argument presented below have previously appeared in print,<sup>10</sup> and Strawson has responded in generous detail.<sup>11</sup> In what follows I’ll try to address his responses; doing so will, I think, help to clarify some terminological confusions between us as well as sharpening where the deep points of disagreement lie.

## Episodic Self-experience

The Episodic–Diachronic distinction is, according to Strawson, ‘another of the great dividing facts about humanity’,<sup>12</sup> grounded in brute genetic, neurological fact,<sup>13</sup> although environmental factors may also play a part.<sup>14</sup> Whilst Strawson takes it that all conscious experience contains a sense of our ‘self’ as some sort of mental thing, Diachronics experience this self as something with significant ongoing temporal duration, while Episodics have less to none of this sense of extension, and experience their selves as existing purely in the here-and-now. Strawson locates himself ‘somewhere down the episodic end of the spectrum’;<sup>15</sup> this allows him to use his own introspectibilia as material for describing such a form of self-experience, but prevents him from furnishing a corresponding account of the phenomenal content of diachronic self-experience. Accordingly he says very little about the character of diachronicity. In earlier work he claims that some people ‘experience their lives in terms of something that has a shape and story, narrative trajectory’,<sup>16</sup> but later distinguishes diachronicity from narrativity, as subjects can experience themselves as narratively conditioned without being diachronic.<sup>17</sup> We’re also told that some diachronic self-experiencers are ‘great planners’,<sup>18</sup> a fact that describes their dispositions of thought, but not, strictly speaking, their self-experience in Strawson’s sense.

Conversely, Strawson describes his own episodic self-experience in striking terms:

I have little interest in my own past and little concern for my future. My poor personal memory rarely impinges on my present consciousness. Even when I am interested in my past, I’m not interested in it specifically in so far as it is mine. I’m perfectly well aware that it is mine, in so far

<sup>10</sup> Stokes 2010c.

<sup>11</sup> Strawson 2011b.

<sup>12</sup> Strawson 1999, p.109.

<sup>13</sup> Strawson 2004, p.431; 2009, p.221.

<sup>14</sup> Strawson 2009, p.221.

<sup>15</sup> Strawson 2003, p.353.

<sup>16</sup> Strawson 2003, p.353.

<sup>17</sup> Strawson 2004, p.446.

<sup>18</sup> Strawson 2003, p.353.

as I am a human being considered as a whole, but I do not really think of it as mine at all, in so far as ‘mine’ picks me out as I am now. For me as I am now, the interest (emotional or otherwise) of my personal memories lies in their experiential content considered independently of the fact that what is remembered happened *to me*—i.e. to the me that is now remembering.<sup>19</sup>

Central to the claimed experience of episodic selfhood is a delamination of the sense of self as a distinct mental entity from my conception of myself as a human being persisting through time. Strawson insists on a distinction between ‘one’s experience of oneself when one is considering oneself principally as a human being taken as a whole, and one’s experience of oneself when one is considering oneself principally as an inner mental entity or “self” of some sort’.<sup>20</sup> This posits two distinct referents for each of the first-person pronouns: a human being persisting across time, and a present mental entity, both of which I can call ‘myself’.<sup>21</sup> To remove this confusion Strawson refers to the mental entity, to ‘what which I experience myself to be when I’m apprehending myself... as a subject of experience that isn’t the same thing as the whole human being that I am’<sup>22</sup> as ‘Me\*’ or ‘I\*’, to distinguish it from the human being ‘me’. For an Episodic such as Strawson, this distinction captures something crucial about their self-experience, for when he remembers an event in his past (‘his’ here picking out Strawson considered as a human being), he experiences no phenomenal sense that the self he is *now* (me\*) is located within that memory:

In my own case, the interest (emotional or otherwise) of my—rather sparse—autobiographical memories lies in their experiential content considered quite independently of the fact that what is remembered happened *to me*. In fact I am strongly inclined to say that the events in question didn’t happen to me—to Me\*, to that which I feel myself to be, in having Self-experience—at all. These memories are of course distinctive in their ‘from-the-inside’ character, and they certainly happened to the human being that I (also) am; but it simply does not follow that they present, or are experienced, as things that happened to Me\* as just characterized.<sup>23</sup>

What Strawson is talking about here should be familiar from Chapter 4: it’s what we previously labelled the structural indifference of episodic memory, the fact that the perspectival organization of such memories in no way connects the notional subject of the memory with the subject now doing the remembering. Even awareness of causal connections between those perspectives, according to Strawson, will not automatically or necessarily impact upon my self-experience in the sense picked out by ‘Me\*’, or give me the phenomenal quality of experiencing that it’s Me\* that was present in that past experience. There would need to be something *extra* encountered in the phenomenal content of memory for an experience of Me\* as being in the past to be possible. And for an Episodic, this ‘something extra’ is

<sup>19</sup> Strawson 2003, pp.353–4.

<sup>20</sup> Strawson 2004, p.429.

<sup>21</sup> While Strawson makes much of this form of double-reference and how frequently it’s implicit in our everyday language, (see e.g. 2003, p.6), some philosophers would deny this; see e.g. Baker 2000, p.68.

<sup>22</sup> Strawson 2009, p.76.

<sup>23</sup> Strawson 1999, p.109.

nowhere to be found, even in the most complete and vivid of first-person-perspective memories:

The 'from-the-inside' character of a memory can detach completely from any lived identification with—any sense of being the same person as—the subject of the remembered experience. My memory of the experience of falling out of a punt last year, for example, has an essentially from-the-inside character, visually (the water rushing up to meet me), kinaesthetically, proprioceptively, and so on, but it doesn't follow, and in my case it isn't true, that it carries any sense at all that what is remembered happened to me\*.<sup>24</sup>

Strawson raises a compelling question: where, even in such a detailed and vivid memory, could I possibly locate a sense that this was something that happened to me\*? Or to put it another way: what experiential *quality* could memory have which might either constitute or indicate a connection between the self that had the original experience and the self remembering it? Strawson's inability to find such a quality amounts to a rejection of the Phenomenal Property Approach (including, a fortiori, Kierkegaard's version of that approach).

The same question arises when Strawson turns from memory of the past to anticipation of the future, and again finds nothing answering to a phenomenal sense of connection between himself\* and the human who he anticipates undergoing the future experience:

I can accurately express my experience by saying that I do not think of Me\* as being something in the future. It is also accurate to shift the 'not', and say, more strongly, that what I think of being in the future is not Me\*.<sup>25</sup>

Strawson is fully aware that the events he envisions from his remembered past and anticipated future are events in the life of the *human being* he is (the identity conditions of which are not here in question). Yet in these experiences of memory and anticipation there is no distinctive phenomenal content that links the human being figured in them with the phenomenally present self he feels himself to be in the moment of remembering or anticipating. The 'first-personal mode of givenness' that characterizes self-experience does not contain *in itself* any significant sense of temporal extension,<sup>26</sup> and none is provided by considering the past or future of the human being that the Episodic fully acknowledges being.

## The Reductive Account of Diachronicity

It's important to note that 'Diachronic' and 'Episodic' are not, according to Strawson, absolute, mutually exclusive terms, but instead exist on a spectrum of 'temporal temperaments'. Accordingly, Diachronics might experience themselves more-or-less episodically some of the time, and *vice versa*. Strawson himself acknowledges certain

<sup>24</sup> Strawson 2009, p.226.

<sup>25</sup> Strawson 2003, p.354.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Zahavi and Parnas 1999, p.255.

features of his own experience of memory and anticipation that appear to be diachronic in character. Yet he describes these in a way that renders their diachronicity ephemeral and essentially artefactual:

In so far as I have any sense of Me\* (rather than the living human being that I am) as something with a history and a future, it seems that this sense is a wispy, short-range product of, and in no way a ground of, my innate predisposition to physiological impulses that develop into experiences of anxiety or regret. It delimits when scrutinised, and it is more accurate to say that it does not exist.<sup>27</sup>

Strawson doesn't claim that *no one* experiences a sense of identity with their remembered selves, merely that 'a sense of the self *need not* necessarily involve a sense of it as something that has long-term continuity'<sup>28</sup> and that, in fact, for Episodics it *does* not. Yet his account contains some clearly reductionist elements that seek to explain diachronicity *away*, in a way that accords episodicity a certain conceptual priority. Strawson vividly describes the heavily disjointed character of consciousness: not so much a continuously flowing stream as a gappy, fitful series of saccadic jumps between intentional objects: 'always shooting off, fuzzing, shorting out, spurting, and stalling . . . trains of thought are continually broken by detours—by blows—fissures—white noise'.<sup>29</sup> This places another serious constraint on any possible experience of the self as something with any sort of significant temporal extension, for Strawson denies that:

the Persistence Belief—the sense of the self as something that has long-term continuity—has some sort of iron phenomenological warrant in the immediate character of our moment-to-moment experience of the process of consciousness. I don't think it's supported at the level of detail by any experiential phenomenon of steady uninterrupted flow . . . In so far as there's support for the Persistence Belief in the moment-to-moment character of our experience of the process of consciousness, much of it derives indirectly from other sources—the massive constancies and developmental coherencies of content . . . that standardly link up experiences through time, and by courtesy of short-term memory, across all the small radical jumps and breaks of flow.<sup>30</sup>

According to Strawson, we do not have a 'Persistence *Experience* that is independent of, not a product of, the Persistence Belief'<sup>31</sup>—leaving it rather unclear just what diachronic experience could possibly consist in, other than some sort of artefact produced by the thematic continuity of our thoughts across time (or reflection thereupon). Strawson has replied that his view is a) not reductive in the way I claim it is, b) does not try to explain diachronicity away, and that c) his definition of diachronicity as 'the sense that the self I am now was present in the past' constitutes 'a clear and substantive description of a way of experiencing things that

<sup>27</sup> Strawson 2003, pp.354–5.

<sup>28</sup> Strawson 2003, p.355, my emphasis.

<sup>29</sup> Strawson 2009, p.234.

<sup>30</sup> Strawson 2009, p.245.

<sup>31</sup> Strawson 2009, p.247.

is familiar to many'.<sup>32</sup> Though clear enough, I'm not it *is* substantive as here given—let alone, as Strawson insists, 'phenomenologically speaking substantive'.<sup>33</sup> We need *some* sort of phenomenological description of what diachronic experience is *like* that is more informative than 'a sense of my\* being in the past' if the term is to have purchase.

The assertion that diachronicity is just a brute, unanalysable fact about how many of us experience memory and anticipation sits uneasily with Strawson's claim that there is no phenomenal warrant for the Persistence Belief, and that any experience of persistence we might have is artefactual. Even if an experience of persisting and an experience of diachronicity were not the same thing, it's difficult to avoid the conclusion that, on Strawson's view, Episodics experience their selves more accurately than Diachronics. Strawson has insisted that our temporal temperament is not connected to the 'metaphysical proposal' that selves are short-lived: the ephemerality of selves has no bearing on whether we experience ourselves\* as extended in time.<sup>34</sup> Yet even if episodicity does not track the duration of actual selves in the sense of being *caused* by that duration, it still seems more 'true to the facts' than diachronicity (even if, given variability among Episodics, some will experience a duration more closely aligned to the 'actual' duration of the self than others).<sup>35</sup> In Strawson's picture, Diachronics experience a persistence that in fact isn't there, whereas Episodics do not. That being the case, diachronic self-experience seems to be a mere illusion generated by our awareness of our temporal extension as human beings; it falsifies self-experience in a way episodicity does not, even if there is no causal link between the duration of selves and episodic self-experience. Diachronicity therefore isn't simply another way of experiencing the self, but a *distortion* of the more fundamental episodic mode of self-experience.<sup>36</sup> Episodicity thus seems to have something distinctively normative about it, even if it is not entirely clear precisely what *sort* of normativity this is—perhaps we can say that diachronicity, lacking real warrant, is somehow an 'inauthentic' experience of oneself.<sup>37</sup>

Strawson sets out to show that there is nothing *wrong*—epistemically, psychologically, morally—in episodic self-experience. The Strong Lack Argument in reply runs thus: in defending the episodic form of life from the criticism that it is deficient, Strawson implicitly claims, against his stated intentions, that it's the Diachronics who have gotten it wrong and that episodicity is the more fundamental and less distorted mode of self-experience. Unless Strawson is prepared to give up his neutrality and

<sup>32</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.178.

<sup>33</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.179.

<sup>34</sup> Strawson, 'Episodic Ethics', p.89.

<sup>35</sup> Strawson, 'Episodic Ethics', p.89.

<sup>36</sup> Rudd (2012, p.207, n.18) also makes the claim that Strawson seems committed to the 'metaphysical superiority' of the episodic life, for 'according to Strawson's own strange metaphysics of the radically punctual self... the Episodic's sense of self tracks the truth about the nature of selfhood better than the Diachronic's'.

<sup>37</sup> On why, if we assume reductionism is true, it might be a good thing to realign our experiences of (and attitudes towards) personal identity with underlying realities, see e.g. Parfit 1984, pp.281–2; Martin 1998, pp.27–8.

fully embrace this claim that diachronicity is an illusion, he therefore needs to posit some distinctive property in Diachronics' experience of themselves that cannot be analysed away in the way his own phenomenally derivative, 'whispy, short-range' sense of temporal extension can be. Strawson's more recent assertion that diachronicity is simply a brute phenomenal fact doesn't get around the deflationary character of his earlier descriptions of diachronicity, and it tells us too little about what diachronic experience is like to be helpful.

If we reject the Strong Lack Argument, we're still faced with the Weak Lack Argument: the picture Strawson gives us is incomplete, even if it avoids the tension described above. Strawson's argument might not *need* a fuller account of diachronicity, but such an account is still a reasonable desideratum. If, quite reasonably, an Episodic such as Strawson cannot provide a sufficiently full, non-reductive description of diachronic self-experience, we need to look further afield for an account of what it would be to experience me\* as something with extension into the past and future.

## Kierkegaardian Contemporaneity as Diachronic Self-experience

Strawson's me/me\* distinction captures an important feature of our lived experience of selfhood: the way in which our awareness of ourselves as human beings with careers across time can come apart from our sense of ourselves as we are here-and-now, with the result that we fail to experience a sense of identification with temporally distant parts of our human lives. Strawsonian Episodics are perfectly well aware that their memories or anticipations track events in the life of the *human being* they are, but lack, in Schechtman's terms, some 'deep, phenomenological relation between different portions of a life'<sup>38</sup> (i.e. the portions figured in memory/anticipation and the portion containing my\* present experience). For Diachronics, me\* extends to cover at least some segment of the human past and human future, while for Episodics, the phenomenally encountered self has no such extension and so does not identify itself with anything encountered in memories or anticipations.

Part of the difficulty in showing what robustly diachronic self-experience might consist in stems from claiming that such an experience would amount to a sense that the phenomenal self I am now *was present* in the past and *will be present* in the future. It's very difficult, as Strawson demonstrates, to assign any descriptive content to that idea. Even a memory of *having had* a sense of myself as a mental entity at some past point in time would not amount to a sense that I\* was present in the past, for (given Strawson's claim that there is no phenomenal sense of identity automatically experienced in episodic memory) remembering having had a *similar* sense of self in the past

<sup>38</sup> Schechtman 2007, p.166.



does not automatically entail it was *me\** who was there. But we might fruitfully be able to put things another way: perhaps diachronic selfhood involves not an experience of temporal extension, but a *synchronic* experience of past and present. (This has the advantage of getting around Strawson's reductive claims about the experience of *persistence* as well—if he wants to distinguish diachronicity from persistence-experience, then synchronic experience seems like a viable way to do so.) Perhaps what is at issue is our experience of the past *as* past (which does seem to be a phenomenal property of memory *per se*), but experientially qualified in some way as if it was also present: not so much *Me\** being present in the past, as the past being present here with *Me\**. But what might such an experience be? Here, I think, the picture of *samtidighed* and reflexive memory we've developed over the previous three chapters proves to be a useful input.

The very term 'episodicity' might, at first blush, tend to conjure up the figure of the aesthete, especially as presented in Part I of *Either/Or*, who lives, as they say, 'in the moment'. That's an initially attractive interpretation of the aesthete's relationship to time, and there's certainly an important and powerful sense in which that's true. The 'Crop Rotator', who we met in Chapter 1 and who seeks to elevate forgetting into an art form (EO, 1:293/SKS 2, 282) does so precisely to sever the present moment from any phenomenal connection to the past. As we've seen there are two ways in which the Crop Rotator can do this: straightforward forgetting (which removes the phenomenal past completely, though is difficult to achieve through willpower alone) or through poeticized remembering, which deprives what is remembered of its affective significance for the rememberer. Both A and Johannes the Seducer see themselves as devotees of 'the moment', understood as a category for avoiding diachronic commitments that might become boring. The Seducer goes so far as to declare that 'The moment is everything, and in the moment woman is everything; the consequences I do not understand' (EO 1: 433/SKS 2, 420). Moreover, in the chapter 'The Unhappiest One' we're told that when aesthetes recollect or anticipate, they fail to experience themselves as 'present' (*nærværende*, lit. 'near-being') in the past and future.<sup>39</sup> That certainly seems to smack of Strawsonian episodicity, but does that make Kierkegaard's aesthetes Episodics?

Not exactly. For one thing, Strawson's Episodics experience their lack of temporal extension as a given. By contrast, the Crop Rotator needs to actively cut himself off from his past through attempting to control the manner in which he remembers; his episodicity, if such it be, is something he works to maintain. The lack of presence in the past and future described in 'The Unhappiest One' might seem to gel with some of Strawson's descriptions, and might also sound like something experienced automatically, much like Episodic self-experience. However, it's at least arguable that Kierkegaard thinks even the most unreflective aesthete *does*, on some primordial

<sup>39</sup> On this, see Stokes 2010b.

level, actually *choose* an aesthetic existence, and its concomitant modes of self-experience that might on the surface appear to be simply matters of psychological contingency.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, the description of the aesthete as 'living in the moment', though true in one sense, misses another dimension of the aesthete's experience of time: the aesthete has a remarkable capacity to occupy different times imaginatively,<sup>41</sup> yet this can only be achieved through a sort of renunciation of the *present*. Consider the aesthete's art of recollection: in *Either/Or*, A presents the art of remembering and forgetting as a means of bringing phenomenal reality (or at least the portion of it presented in memory—which will of course be an enormously wide temporal domain relative to one's experienced present) under conscious direction. To draw on David Kangas, it changes my experience of a world ultimately beyond my control into an interiorized re-presentation that is entirely of my positing.<sup>42</sup> But this means that recollection takes a sort of priority over direct experience, such that ultimately, in the more reflectively complicated forms of aesthetic existence, the aesthete experiences things *in order to recollect them*. As touched on in Chapter 1, the aesthete organizes his direct experience of events in such a way as to enjoy what the Seducer calls recollection's 'double effect' (*Erindring virker dobbelt*) (EO, 1:343/SKS 2, 333), thus abstracting his *present* experience out of actuality by turning it into fodder for recollection. He does not engage with the present moment directly, but refracted through the process of recollection *even as it is happening*. Aesthetic recollection wrenches events out of the temporal sequence in which they have meaning and places them into the service of aesthetic enjoyment, and in so doing, phenomenally tears the aesthete *himself* out of temporality. The aesthete 'lives in the moment', yet at the same time *abandons* the present moment altogether.

That's a far more complicated experiential relation to time than episodicity, at least as presented by Strawson. Nonetheless, the experiential absence in the remembered past and anticipated future that's described in the chapter 'The Unhappiest One' in particular does seem to resonate strongly with the form of temporal self-experience Strawson describes. Even so, we don't have to equate episodicity with aestheticism, or claim that the aesthete experiences themselves with Strawsonian episodicity, to argue that Kierkegaard offers a valuable response to Strawson. Instead of simply condemning episodics as aesthetes, what I want to claim here is that Kierkegaardian contemporaneity offers an account of *diachronic* experience—

<sup>40</sup> On the claim that the aesthetic life is chosen on a primordial, pre-reflective level, see Davenport 2001a.

<sup>41</sup> 'How distant must an event be from us in time in order for us to recollect it; how distant so that recollection's longing can no longer grasp it? In this respect, most people have a limit; they cannot recollect what is too close in time, nor can they recollect what is too distant. I know no limit. Yesterday's experience I push back a thousand years in time and recollect it as if it were experienced yesterday' (EO, 1:397–8/SKS 2, 385).

<sup>42</sup> Kangas 2007, p.58.

taking a positive rather than critical route which, in dealing with Kierkegaard, is something of a refreshing novelty!

Contemporaneity, as we've seen, has the effect of making the follower's apprehension of the imaginatively mediated past fully 'present' to them in some phenomenally rich way. This richness does not depend upon phenomenal accuracy or detail, and nor does it require that the experience be felt and understood in the *same* way as at the time of the original experience.<sup>43</sup> It depends upon a specific mode of contemplation, one that involves a quality of *being there*, of being co-present with the past. If such a sense is going to amount to a form of diachronic self-experience—and thereby satisfy Strawson's criteria of experiencing myself\* as being in the past—it cannot be merely reflective or stipulative, as if memories were accompanied by the overt thought 'and that was me'. Neither Kierkegaard nor Strawson see self-consciousness as a matter of thinking thoughts *about* the self.<sup>44</sup> At best, such stipulations or overt self-thematizations could merely endorse the awareness that me-the-human-being was present in the past, which is not in question. Rather there must be an *experienced* identity, and this takes the form of a self-reflexivity built into the imaginative experience, such that it is experienced as somehow *for* the experiencer: it must have the property of *for-you-ness* that Anti-Climacus ascribes to contemporaneity (PC, 64/SKS 12, 76).

It should be pointed out here that this 'for you' character of experience is considerably thicker than (though clearly related to) the bare quality of 'first-personal givenness' cited by traditional phenomenologists. While it has been argued that *every* major phenomenologist from Husserl onwards posits a sense in which every moment of consciousness is phenomenally 'for' the subject,<sup>45</sup> this is simply a property of all moments of consciousness that does not entail any further sense of identity with or responsibility for remembered past selves. Thus while memories would be 'for' the conscious subject, this is just a property they share with all conscious episodes as such, from idle daydreaming to intense concentration. Nor is there anything particularly normative about this sense of first-personal givenness, which is offered simply as a brute fact of consciousness. Kierkegaardian contemporaneity, by contrast, is far richer: it involves a normatively loaded sense of identification between remembered past selves, projected future selves, and the present self. For Kierkegaard, self-experience is morally qualified all the way down: I don't take moral responsibility for myself *on the basis of* a cognitive or reflective apprehension of identity with my

<sup>43</sup> Goldie notes in several places in *The Mess Inside* that it is a crucial feature of memory in general that we can overlay memories with new meanings that change the affective content of those memories: 'In one and the same experience of remembering, and at one and the same time, we inhabit the "omniscience" of our present perspective and the "partiality" of our perspective at the time, seeing things as we then saw them and seeing them as we now see them, in a new and different light. We can and do, consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally, change the way we remember the past, in the light of the triply ironic gap that is opened up and simultaneously bridged by our memories' (Goldie 2012, p.53).

<sup>44</sup> I here disagree with Wilkes' reading of Strawson. Wilkes 1999, pp.31–2.

<sup>45</sup> Zahavi 2005, p.20. For a critique of this claim, see Strawser 2015.

remembered past, but rather that experience of identity is *itself* an *experience of responsibility*. I am able to become contemporary with temporally distant events precisely insofar as I experience them as something that claims, obligates or ‘calls to’ me as an *agent*<sup>46</sup>—and because this is a non-reflective, ‘inward’ (*inderlig*) experience, the entity so claimed by the experience is me\*.

In *samtidig* consciousness, what is remembered or imaginatively (re)constructed somehow presents itself as *in* our lives, in a way that stems from its conferring responsibility upon us. They *demand* something of us, and we experience that demand with the same directness as we experience a claim made upon us by events right in front of us. Consider once again the experience of a direct, face-to-face appeal from a person in need. There are two interrelated reflexive elements to the demand encountered in this experience that give some insight into Kierkegaardian contemporaneity: *unavoidability* and *agent-referentiality*:

- a) The demand is *unavoidable* in that it compels us, one way or the other, to respond; we must either help or refuse to do so (simply walking away from the distressed person would count as the latter). Conversely, it *is* possible to avoid such a demand when the sufferer is kept at some sort of experiential distance from me—the famine victim seen on TV—whereby I can express sympathy without really experiencing this situation as something that makes some demand of *me*. Yet this seems to be an *evasion* of responsibility.
- b) The demand is *agent-referential* in that it compels a response *from me specifically*; I can accept or refuse this responsibility, but I can’t hide behind a generalized ‘you’ the way I can when I see a poster telling me ‘Uncle Sam Wants You!’ As noted in Chapter 2, the latter response again seems to be an evasion.

What Kierkegaard seems to be claiming is that these qualities of direct, first-personal appeal should be a feature of my exercises of memory, because I experience what I remember as something for which, by virtue of my constitution as a moral agent, I am directly and personally responsible. I can no longer rightly keep the remembered past at a phenomenal *distance*. And insofar as this phenomenally collapses the perspectives of the remembering self and the remembered self figured in the memory, this will amount to seeing it as occurring directly to me\*. It is still the case that, as in Strawson’s punt example, there is nothing in the given *content* of our memories that refers back to me as I am now (just as, in Kierkegaard’s paradigm case of contemporaneity, I-as-I-am-now am not to be found in any imaginative representation of the life of Jesus). But I can experience those memories as if they were happening to me\* to the extent that I can experience them as claiming me\* in this way. Not all memories have

<sup>46</sup> The capacity of imagined and remembered scenarios, as well as narratives such as stories and parables, to claim us as specific individuals is an important feature of Kierkegaard’s moral psychology generally; see Stokes 2010a for a fuller account.

strong normative content of course—my memory of eating an ice cream last summer doesn't seem to have any strong moral affect associated with it or make any moral claim on me now—but this doesn't preclude me from seeing it as something I am *responsible* for in the way I've described, even if that responsibility has no immediately discernable moral implications. Equally, the experience of contemporaneity with our past and future need not always be either imaginatively vivid or affectively rich, but it will be experientially different from, say, mere fantasy.

A final feature of Kierkegaard's account of contemporaneity (and subjectivity in general) worth noting is its volitional ambiguity. James Giles invokes Kierkegaard in support of the idea that identifying with our past selves is something we actively *choose* rather than have experientially imposed upon us.<sup>47</sup> I think, however, this is a false dichotomy. It's true that Kierkegaard thinks we are responsible for achieving contemporaneity with our past, but he also would insist that I can take responsibility for something on a merely reflective, intellectual level without subjectively or inwardly taking responsibility. And it's here that the ambiguity arises: the agent is *responsible* for inwardly taking responsibility, yet it's far from clear that we simply *choose* to *feel* responsibility in this phenomenally deep way. This shouldn't necessarily be seen as a weakness of Kierkegaard's account, as it coheres with some of our everyday intuitions about the experience of responsibility. We find a lack of remorse in criminal offenders, for instance, to be culpable *in itself*, while remorse is sometimes taken as a reason to mitigate punishment; yet that being the case, if we could simply choose to feel remorse, surely *all* apprehended criminals would have a compelling prudential reason to do so? Rather, remorse is built into our mode of apprehension of the past in ways we are not entirely in control of, but are nonetheless answerable for. The same is true in general for the moral character on the basis of which we experience contemporaneity in episodic memory.

## Contemporaneity and Episodic Ethics

To recapitulate our motivation for introducing Kierkegaard into the debate over episodic selfhood: Strawson's picture, lacking a robust account of diachronic self-experience, is incomplete. On the Weak Lack Argument this is something we should want to remedy for the sake of completeness if nothing else, while on the Strong Lack Argument Strawson actually *requires* a non-reductive description of diachronic self-experience if he is to maintain that Diachronics are not merely deluded Episodics. Either way, the Kierkegaardian account of contemporaneity offers what's missing: a phenomenal account of what it is to experience co-identity with our former selves. I do not, as I indicated above, claim that this is the *only* possible account of diachronicity, nor that Strawsonians *must* accept this particular account. But

<sup>47</sup> Giles 1997, p.89.

they must provide *some* non-reductive picture of diachronicity, and Kierkegaard's account at least provides a very good place to start. Yet I think it has considerably more going for it than just its availability. Individual readers may differ markedly on whether Kierkegaard's distinction between contemporaneous versus non-contemporaneous forms of memory and anticipation rings true phenomenologically. But it also has two further philosophical advantages that commend it.

The first is that the thoroughly normative character of Kierkegaardian contemporaneity helps to ground concerns many commentators have expressed about whether Strawsonian Episodics can live fully moral lives. Of particular concern are self-reflexive emotions such as remorse, pride, or regret, emotions that are taken to be important features of our moral lives. The concern commentators such as Wilkes have had is that the episodic implicitly 'treat[s] past selves as *others*',<sup>48</sup> whereas the object of self-reflexive emotions is necessarily *oneself*. If one does not see one's past and future person-stages as being oneself, surely these self-reflexive emotions are not experientially available? And if they are unavailable, isn't the Episodic cut off from whatever moral value (be it epistemic or motivational) such experiences might have?

Strawson has a two-part reply: that self-reflexive emotions are in fact available to Episodics, and that, in any case, nothing morally important would be lost even if they were not. With respect to the first part, he simply asserts that Episodics *just do* experience past-directed, ostensibly-identity-tracking affective responses, despite having no sense that the events that are the intentional object of these emotions occurred to them\*. Likewise, he asserts that a feeling of myself\* being obligated on the basis of the past acts of the human being I am 'is an experiential fact for many Episodics, make of it what you will'.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps such experiences are simply a neurophysiological hangover, as Strawson takes anxiety over the future to be (see the following section, 'Fearing the Future, Fearing Death'). But on the phenomenological level—the level on which Strawson's account of episodicity operates—there is still something puzzling about the notion of remorse, guilt, or self-regarding pride or embarrassment divorced from any sense of identification with my past and future person-stages.

Strawson has replied that this misrepresents his views: he does not claim that Episodics do not identify with past person-stages. Rather, they simply lack 'the strong identification of feeling that I\* performed the action', while retaining 'the identification of knowing that GS performed the action, that I am GS, that GS's actions are my\* business and responsibility':<sup>50</sup>

I can and do have, as a non-Diachronic, and in Stokes's words, 'a sense that I\* am *as* responsible for my past deeds as I am for what I\* do right now'. I can fail to feel the same emotions about A as I did before, and even fail to feel I\* performed A, while knowing that A is my—my\*—business. I don't have to feel that I\* performed A in order to have an 'experience of

<sup>48</sup> Wilkes 1999, p.28.

<sup>49</sup> Strawson 2007, p.100.

<sup>50</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.191.

full affective responsibility' for A. If Stokes stipulates that 'full affective responsibility' for A entails feeling that I\* did A, I'll give him the phrase, and insist that one can as a non-Diachronic take full responsibility for A, in a genuinely morally feeling way, without experiencing Stokesian 'full affective responsibility'.<sup>51</sup>

There is still, according to Strawson, a sense of responsibility for a past action, 'ownership of it, and this is something immediate, unreflective, and that concerns me\*',<sup>52</sup> without this involving a sense of my\* having carried the action out. He retains 'A proper sense of responsibility for my (GS's) past actions...lodged in me\* as I am in the present'<sup>53</sup> that falls short of a sense that his\* actions are those of GS; yet neither does he have a sense that 'it is my\* bad luck that GS did whatever regrettable thing he did; nor do I lack awareness of the fact that I have some sort of special connection with the action'.<sup>54</sup> Such 'ownership without authorship' as Strawson is prepared to call this 'special connection' is, he claims, in no way ethically inferior as a sense of responsibility to that experienced by Diachronics. Strawson tells us here that the sense of responsibility involved here can be understood on the model of responsibility for the actions of members of one's family;<sup>55</sup> 'I\*'m therefore responsible for [GS's action] in at least the sense in which I can be responsible for the damage caused by a member of my family or my ward'.<sup>56</sup>

But the 'at least' clause there is telling. Strawson here seems to appeal to some affective condition in between a remorseful sense that I\* did the wrong thing, and a regretful sense that *someone* did it.<sup>57</sup> He notes a 'phenomenon of natural transition of a sense of responsibility'<sup>58</sup> that allows us to feel pride or shame over what our family, nation, or species has done, without thereby having a sense that I—let alone I\*—did these things. Such a sense of responsibility can be 'strong and particular—personal', and while this may be different in 'tone' with his\* experience of responsibility for what GS has done, the two experiences nonetheless have 'kinship'.<sup>59</sup> But this analogy of kinship can lead us in one of two, equally unsatisfactory, directions. Either I feel somewhat *less* remorse for what my past, non-me\* self did than things I\* do, in the same way as I feel more remorse for my personal actions than those of my family, nation, or species; or else I am *so* closely related to the non-me\* selves that the distinction seems to collapse. If there is a middle position between regret over the actions of others and remorse over my own, it is difficult to discern where it could be. The sorts of responsibility or embarrassment we might feel for something our child has done, for instance, are admittedly complex, and the various strands of other-directed

<sup>51</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.188.

<sup>52</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.189.

<sup>53</sup> Strawson 2007, pp.100–1.

<sup>54</sup> Strawson 2007, p.102.

<sup>55</sup> Strawson 2011b, pp.188–9.

<sup>56</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.192.

<sup>57</sup> I am grateful for a comment from Anthony Rudd for helping me see this. See also Rudd 2012, p.209: 'it seems that all [Strawson] can find good in contrition, apart from a purely intellectual judgement that my past act was wrong, is a feeling of sorrow for the pain caused, essentially no different from a feeling of sorrow for the pain caused by another person, or even by an earthquake. But this seems to miss something essential.'

<sup>58</sup> Strawson 2007, p.102.

<sup>59</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.181.

(dis)approval and self-congratulation/self-reproach may not be easy to disentangle; but these complex responses don't seem to be as fully self-reflexive as responses like pride, remorse, or guilt.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, presumably as an Episodic I could feel strong disapproval for the things I *regarded as a human being* have done—but the worry persists that this isn't *remorse*. Even if accompanied by strong emotion rather than the 'cold acknowledgement' that Schechtman sees Strawson as endorsing,<sup>61</sup> this sort of attitude still seems to hold the object of responsibility at some sort of distance (of the sort discussed in Chapter 2). A combination of regret and acknowledged liability doesn't necessarily equate to self-reflexive remorse.

In requiring such a middle position, Strawson implicitly acknowledges that a proper sense of moral obligation entailed by past actions involves more than mere intellectual assent to their having been committed by the human being for which I\* am responsible. But if there *is* no middle experience between diachronic remorse and impersonal regret—and it is far from clear that there is—then remorse just *is* diachronic, even when it manifests among Episodics.<sup>62</sup>

Positing diachronic regret as a function of Kierkegaardian contemporaneity takes us down this second, more parsimonious path. The experience of full affective responsibility is a sense that I\* am *as* responsible for my past deeds as I am for what I\* do right now. Anything less, on this line, is not a true experience of responsibility. Hence contemporaneity passes a fairly unforgiving judgement upon Episodics: either they don't experience *real* remorse, or they actually experience past events with the same sense of immediacy as they experience present ones, which we're arguing here would, in fact, count as diachronicity. On the Kierkegaardian line, we don't base moral responsibility upon a prior experience of diachronic extension; rather, to experience ourselves as fully responsible *is* to experience ourselves as diachronically extended, because it brings our past and present into synchronic experience. This is a version of what Strawson calls the 'Emotional Priority Thesis': feelings such as embarrassment or remorse that seemingly presuppose diachronicity are actually themselves the foundation for the diachronic outlook.<sup>63</sup> But while Strawson thinks the Emotional Priority Thesis leads us to form a *belief* in diachronic extension that may or may not be justified metaphysically (or even phenomenally, given Strawson's scepticism about phenomenal 'warrant'), on the Kierkegaardian picture, to experience phenomenal contemporaneity *is* to be diachronic, independently of whatever beliefs the experience might cause us to form.

<sup>60</sup> There may, for example, be instances where it's ambiguous whether I feel pride at my child's achievements or pride at myself as their parent (or, if they're screaming their heads off in a shopping centre, embarrassment on their behalf versus embarrassment at how bystanders must judge my parenting). But I don't see that such cases are in principle undecidable.

<sup>61</sup> Schechtman 2007, p.177.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Rudd 2012, pp.209–10: 'To genuinely believe that I have done something horrible *is* to feel horrible about it. To claim the belief without feeling anything except a general sympathy for the victims seems to be, if not simply hypocrisy, then a kind of self-deceptive self-exculpation.'

<sup>63</sup> Strawson 2007, p.99.



Strawson, however, objects to this use of the word ‘remorse’: ‘I take “remorse” to be the name of a highly distinctive moral emotion which is certainly not a necessary part of genuinely feeling responsible for something, whereas Stokes sometimes seems to take it to be more or less synonymous with “feeling responsible.”’<sup>64</sup> It’s quite true that in my argument as presented here I’ve been particularly focussed on remorse, and that not every experience of responsibility can be characterized as a remorseful one. After all, pride is also a self-reflexive emotion that would seem to depend upon a sense that I\* am responsible for the commendable thing I remember doing. Strawson points out that the sort of objection I put forward to his view would also entail someone who doesn’t take proper pride in her achievements would also not be properly identifying with their past self. Against this he offers the figure of a perfectly good Diachronic with nothing in his history to feel remorse over, but who takes no pride in his past achievements, chalking these up to luck.<sup>65</sup> Here it seems one could reply that, depending on one’s beliefs about agent-responsibility, one *should* feel such pride. Alternatively, one could reply that there just is an asymmetry in what we’re responsible for, such that we should rue our mistakes but not exalt at our successes. Interestingly, one can arguably find both responses in Kierkegaard.<sup>66</sup>

So Strawson is right to point out that remorse is just one of the ways in which we can feel responsible. But the important thing about remorse, embarrassment, pride, and so on is precisely that they recruit a past action to me\* in a way that allows no space for affective disidentification. Strawson wants to insist that a Diachronic can feel responsibility for a past action, and that this will be more than a merely cognitive awareness of liability. He describes ‘a feeling of responsibility for past actions, that is... essentially more than just a belief in one’s wrongdoing’ but which ‘doesn’t require any sort of feeling of guilt, or any Kierkegaardian contemporaneity as I understand it; such a ‘feeling or attitude of responsibility’ and ‘self-admonition’ ‘is, perhaps, a quieter, truer, more sober phenomenon than guilt’.<sup>67</sup> I’d agree that Diachronics needn’t spend their waking hours wracked with guilt in the rather dramatic sense in which Strawson uses the term; rather the guilt I’d endorse would be more like the element of ‘continuing self-reproach’ that John Lippitt argues is a key component of self-forgiveness.<sup>68</sup> But the danger here, I’d suggest, is that a certain self-reflexive attitude is necessary for understanding the full nature of an action’s significance for the agent: a full sense that it is *my\** action, not just an action I\* happen to be responsible for.

Strawson himself imagines an objector asserting (as I’ve done here) that remorse *must* be diachronic to be genuine, and replies simply that ‘Our disagreement is

<sup>64</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.190.

<sup>65</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.178.

<sup>66</sup> Kierkegaard claims in several places that our successes are in no way our own achievement but should be credited to God, which would seem to obviate any possibility of pride. Conversely, John Lippitt (2013, pp.181–9) has recently argued that Kierkegaard’s insistence on proper self-love in *Works of Love* does indeed seem to allow for a certain kind of justified pride.

<sup>67</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.184.

<sup>68</sup> Lippitt 2013, pp.170–2.

clear'—but, to move to the second part of Strawson's reply, nothing ethically significant ultimately hangs on the point: 'One doesn't have to care about oneself in any essentially self-concerned way, still less feel or conceive it as one's own, in order to act well or be disposed to act well.'<sup>69</sup> Strawson insists that a 'past action calls to me as a non-Diachronic, in that I\* now feel a sense of responsibility for it, ownership of it',<sup>70</sup> and can still respond to the needs of others, make amends to them for my past behaviours, and see that I don't repeat my past misdeeds. That, he says, is enough to make episodic lives no less morally valid than diachronic ones.

This does suggest an important difference between the understanding of ethics with which I'm operating, which sees remorse and contrition as morally valuable independently of how they motivate behaviour, and the understanding which Strawson uses. For Strawson, what matters morally is how I act in the present, which allows him to dismiss the feeling of guilt as 'a chimpanzee thing, and wholly so, an ancient adaptive emotional reflex in social animals' that plays no role in improving our behaviour and thus 'adds nothing—nothing good—to moral being'.<sup>71</sup> To feel guilt, for Strawson, is 'always to feel something more than whatever feeling is morally required'<sup>72</sup> and can in fact be an impediment to moral action by creating an avenue for moral self-indulgence (which is a fair point *if* we take it, as I do not, that guilt needs to be overtly thematized in our thinking in order to give us moral insight into the nature of our actions). Strawson's picture retains conscience as, in the wonderful Middle English phrase he cites, the 'agenbite of inwit', but loses the idea that the guilt-affect might track or disclose our moral *status* as indexed to a life, the *totality* of which we might somehow be answerable for. (Indeed, in his discussion of Locke, he explicitly rejects such a picture, as we'll see.) As I'll be developing across the rest of this book (and particularly Chapters 7–9), I take it that part of what makes Kierkegaard's moral thinking valuable is his acknowledgement that each of us confronts our life as something for which we are uniquely and inescapably responsible, not just in the sense of being responsible for our present characters and liabilities but *also* for the shape and quality of our life overall. Both Strawson and Kierkegaard agree that, in Strawson's phrase, 'one has a certain overall moral standing, or moral quality, or moral being, or moral identity, at any given time'.<sup>73</sup> Where they disagree is on how the past figures in that moral identity. For Strawson, this moral status has nothing essentially to do with one's past history: 'It's wholly constituted by one's present disposition, metaphysically speaking, and necessarily so. One's actions up to now are no part of it, however much they may reveal it.'<sup>74</sup> Kierkegaard's conception of moral standing is concerned *both* with how one stands at present *and* how one's life stands overall: a concern for *one's life as a totality as viewed from here and now* that Strawson explicitly repudiates. This does not mean that we need to be concerned for the totality of our life in a self-absorbed way, but that our actions should be shot

<sup>69</sup> Strawson 2007, p.104.

<sup>72</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.184.

<sup>70</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.189.

<sup>73</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.192.

<sup>71</sup> Strawson 2007, p.93.

<sup>74</sup> Strawson 2011b, p.192.

through with a subjective, agential depth that may be seriously compromised by a lack of affective identification with the past.

For the moment, it is enough that enlisting Kierkegaardian contemporaneity to provide the robust form of diachronicity that Strawson's account lacks offers the following advantages:

- 1) It allows us to explain in non-reductive terms (i.e. without appealing to reflective artefact or biological hardwiring) the occurrence of seemingly diachronic feelings such as embarrassment and remorse in Episodics, for having these experiences *is* diachronic self-experience.
- 2) It legitimates the intuition that a non-diachronic feeling of responsibility is somehow deficient, by positing that the feeling of responsibility *is* the sense of diachronic extension.

So *if* we take it that such a deep sense of responsibility is necessary for moral life, then the account of contemporaneity we've provided helps underpin the intuition that a sense of diachronic extension is necessary for a genuine feeling of responsibility.

## Fearing the Future, Fearing Death

Just as adopting Kierkegaardian contemporaneity as our model of diachronic self-experience provides a less reductive explanation than Strawson does of how Episodics can experience remorse, embarrassment, and so on, it also offers a more parsimonious explanation for certain puzzling features of Strawson's experience of imagining the future. When he considers his episodic anticipations of things to come, Strawson once again finds no sense that he as he is now is the self that will be in the future: 'I do not think of Me\* as being something in the future. It is also accurate to shift the "not," and say, more strongly, that what I think of as being in the future is not Me\*.'<sup>75</sup> But as a phenomenologist of episodic self-experience, Strawson still has to account for how anxiety over future events in our lives is possible for Episodics, who do not think of themselves\* as 'being something in the future'. Strawson explicitly claims that his anxiety over the future, though palpable, contains no sense of himself\* as temporally extended:

As I write these words, the thought that I have to give a lecture before a large audience in two months' time causes me some worry, which has familiar psychological manifestations. I feel the anxiety naturally and directly as pertaining to me even though I have no sense that it will be Me\* that will be giving the lecture. Indeed it seems completely false to say that it will be Me\*. And this is how it feels, not something I believe for theoretical reasons. So why do I feel any anxiety now?<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Strawson 2003, p.354.

<sup>76</sup> Strawson 2003, p.354.

Indeed, there *is* something puzzling about anxiety over the future if identity is reduced to facts about the ongoing continuity of the human being. A curious feature of our fearful apprehension of the future is just how big a role identity—in something like the strict logical sense—plays in it. And this role persists even when it's demonstrated that the identity-facts our egocentric concern over future events appear to track do not, in fact, obtain. Examples have been offered in the copious literature on concern for future selves that seem to show that questions about personal identity admit of no non-trivial determinate answers.<sup>77</sup> Yet the concern that motivates such questions is notoriously hard to exorcise: awareness that there is no significant point at which identity conditions between me and a future self suddenly cease to hold does not, it seems, alter the all-or-nothing character of egocentric concern. The operative concern when, say, Williams' victim asks 'will it be *me* that's tortured tomorrow after the brain surgery?' seems to be *precisely* with identity in a strict logical sense. Being told by a helpful philosopher that such a question is finally unanswerable, or even incoherent, doesn't seem to enable me to stop asking it.<sup>78</sup> Regardless of what we might believe about the underlying metaphysics, our concern seems, unavoidably, to track an all-or-nothing conception of our identity. When all the psychological and physical facts about human-being-continuity are swept away, as they are in the thought-experiments offered by Williams and Parfit, we can't stop asking ourselves if it will be *me* who is to suffer—and if those facts have indeed been removed, the 'me' asked about in such a question can only be *Me\**. But if, as I'm suggesting here, such an all-or-nothing conception of personal identity appears to be a non-eliminable feature of our egocentric concern, then it becomes extremely puzzling how Episodics, who have *no* sense of having a long-term self (over and above the human being), can experience states like anxiety for the future.

Strawson's answer to this problem is, as with guilt, to posit anxiety over the future as something coded into our biology, 'a manifestation of the instinct for self-preservation'<sup>79</sup> with obvious adaptive utility. This biological basis allows anxiety over the future to persist 'even though it is not supported by any emotionally backed sense on the part of *Me\** now that *Me\** will be there in the future'.<sup>80</sup> If we weren't genetically hardwired to feel anxiety about future events, we simply wouldn't feel it, even though we are fully aware that future events will occur to the human being that I am. At most, we'd feel sympathy for that human in the same way we feel sympathy for others without *being* those others.<sup>81</sup> But egocentric concern (including anxiety), as I've suggested above, turns precisely on *Me\**-identity. And the hapless victim trying to work out if he will be tortured tomorrow will probably take as little comfort

<sup>77</sup> See e.g. Williams 1973, pp.55–6; Parfit 1984, pp.231–43.

<sup>78</sup> Rudd 2005, p.415; Schechtman 1996, pp.63–4; Martin 1998, p.112. I discuss this issue at length in Stokes 2013b.

<sup>79</sup> Strawson 2003, p.354.

<sup>80</sup> Strawson 2003, p.354.

<sup>81</sup> Strawson 1999, p.109.

from the thought that his anxiety is a non-truth-tracking evolutionary artefact as he will from the thought that identity-questions don't admit of determinate or significant answers.

Strawson does allow one exception to the failure to identify with future selves: it is certainly Me\* whom I think of as subject to mortality.<sup>82</sup> Strawson explains this apparent anomaly by pointing to the fact that eternal nonexistence makes the gap constituted by the indefinite but finite time remaining to me approximate to nothing, just as any number of any size approximates to zero when compared to infinity.<sup>83</sup> This answer isn't entirely satisfactory. For one thing, it's not clear that the infinite *duration* of eternal non-existence is necessarily a feature in the apprehension of death.<sup>84</sup> The thought of permanent non-existence would seem to be enough to strike the fear of death into us, without requiring some further mathematical intuition about how *long* we won't exist for.

Fortunately, a more elegant answer to the question of why my death should matter to me is to hand—and again, it is supplied by the Kierkegaardian account of contemporaneity. This is most strongly attested in the discourse 'At a Graveside', where Kierkegaard replies to Epicurus that when we contemplate our death with *alvor*, 'earnestness' or 'seriousness,' we *are* co-present with our death: 'you are and death also is' (TDIO, 75/SKS 5, 446). Kierkegaard doesn't use the language of contemporaneity here, though it is clear the same sort of imaginatively mediated co-presence is involved. By becoming contemporary with our death, we bridge the gulf between ourselves now and our death, in a way that occurs on a purely immediate experiential level and makes *this* death into *my* death.<sup>85</sup> What Kierkegaard calls the 'certain-uncertainty' of death means that the imagined *content* of that death may be ambiguous, as there are limitless ways in which I can imagine myself dying, from a violent demise five minutes from now to a peaceful death in old age. Yet while some scenarios are obviously more likely than others—heart attack versus shark attack, for instance—and only *one* scenario will *actually* occur (which may well be one I *don't* anticipate), the fact that each possible death is qualified as possible-for-me means it is open for me to relate to it in a way that makes it co-present with me.

<sup>82</sup> Strawson 2003, p.355. Mark Johnston (2010, p.180) also distinguishes between 'two sorts of de se thought, a merely indexical thought directed to the person or human being that I am, and a truly subjective thought, as it were, directed to the self that I am' and claims that it's the second thought—which we can see here is cognate with Strawson's Me\*—that 'appears to reach out to my subjective death'. But, according to Johnston, this appearance is illusory, for reasons we will discuss in Chapter 8.

<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, Schopenhauer claims that the same thought actually makes death seem *less* fearful: 'the few years that one has yet to be, vanish entirely before the endless time when one will be no more. Accordingly it appears to reflection even ludicrous to be so anxious about this span of time, to tremble so much if our own life or that of another is in danger, and to compose tragedies the horror of which has its strength in the fear of death.' Schopenhauer 1909, p.252.

<sup>84</sup> For a more detailed critique of Strawson on fearing death, see Behrendt 2007, especially p.136.

<sup>85</sup> For an extended discussion of imaginative co-presence in the contemplation of death, see Stokes 2006.

It may also be that I can contemplate my death in a way that is nearly devoid of phenomenal content altogether: the sheer thought of my death *as such* may be enough to bring us to such presence, even though this might have only the thinnest imaginative content.<sup>86</sup> We saw in Chapter 2 that Kierkegaardian contemporaneity in no way depends upon the depth or accuracy of the phenomenal content of imagined scenarios; how we relate to the scenario is decisive, not the conceptual detail or representational verisimilitude of the way the scenario is presented. It may therefore be possible for us to become contemporaneous with our death regardless of the way in which this is envisaged occurring.

In such cases, my death is *for me* in a real sense, because an ‘earnest’ contemplation of death, one that connects the future event with my present existence in normatively charged ways, plays out phenomenally as my death becoming *present* to me. It’s not just an event in my life, albeit one I won’t live through,<sup>87</sup> it’s what will happen to Me\*—because in contemplating my death I\* become synchronous with the self that will one day do the dying, over and above the fact that that dying self and I ‘share’ a human organism. And we can extend this to cover more mundane instances of how we anticipate the future. Events in my future are experienced as events that will happen to Me\* insofar as I\* relate to them as such, which I do through a specific mode of contemplation in which I contemplate them as if they were happening to Me\* right now.

## Diachronicity: From Descriptive to Normative

I’ve tried to use Kierkegaard’s work to supply the missing account of diachronic self-experience that Strawson doesn’t give us. If Kierkegaard is correct that our psychology contains resources for becoming co-present with past events, then it would appear he has supplied an *immediate* (phenomenal, experiential) link between the past and present self. Contemporaneity also has a certain philosophical attractiveness in that it provides a more economical explanation of how Episodics can sometimes experience such apparently diachronic feelings as remorse and embarrassment as ‘involving their me\*’. With respect to explaining our fear of future events and death, the Kierkegaardian model is again more parsimonious, in that it posits one mechanism for generating a sense of identity with imagined selves rather than at least two (biological and mathematical) as in Strawson.

But as I have stressed, all this does is provide *one* phenomenology of diachronic self-experience; and while I submit that it’s a compelling and attractive articulation of what diachronicity consists in (and it has the welcome benefit of seeming to legitimate the widespread concern that there’s *something* deficient about episodicity), others may find it far less plausible. For Strawsonians, moreover, adopting this model

<sup>86</sup> On the claim that there is a particular fear of non-existence-as-such, see Behrendt 2010.

<sup>87</sup> Wittgenstein 1996, p.185.

of diachronicity to plug the gap in Strawson's account comes at a steep price: the normative character of contemporaneity reinscribes some of the worries about whether Episodics can experience fully moral lives and have genuine feelings of responsibility and remorse. If Strawsonians wish to insist that there is nothing normative about diachronic self-experience, then they must reject Kierkegaardian contemporaneity as a candidate phenomenology of diachronicity, and, at least according to the Strong Lack Argument, look for something else.

It's entirely possible that Strawsonians can provide another such account, of equal or greater plausibility, of what diachronicity is like. However if they also wish to maintain Strawson's posture of neutrality between episodic and diachronic self-experience, their new account of diachronicity would have to be robust enough to avoid implicitly making episodicity morally or epistemologically normative, in the way Strawson's existing descriptions of diachronicity sometimes do. If they do not or cannot, then per the Weak Lack Argument they are offering a dissatisfyingly incomplete picture. If we further endorse the Strong Lack Argument, then they will need to give up the ecumenical stance Strawson has sought to maintain, in one of two ways. They can either fully embrace the deflationism about diachronicity that already haunts Strawson's work, and assert that Diachronics are in the grip of an illusion (at best benign, at worst positively harmful) from which Episodics are mercifully free; or they can accept a phenomenology (such as the one I've outlined here) which privileges diachronicity over episodicity. Unless they can supply us with a phenomenology of diachronic self-experience that is both normatively neutral and non-reductive, the Strong Lack Argument claims, Strawsonians will have to pick sides.

## 5

# Self-alienation

Chapter 4 spent quite a lot of time arguing against Galen Strawson's claims for Episodic selfhood. I'm not the first person to take up that task, and I doubt I'll be the last. But part of the reason why I devoted so much space to that question is that I think there is an important core of phenomenological truth in what Strawson is talking about. I have serious reservations about many of Strawson's claims, but the central insight that we can, and many of us frequently do, fail to identify with our past and future person-stages is a crucial one, and Strawson's descriptions of episodic self-experience do have something unsettlingly familiar to them. What Strawson's depiction of Episodic self-experience brings to the fore is the way in which our cognitive and practical awareness of our extension across time, on the one hand, and our phenomenal sense of self, on the other, can and do come apart—and the bifurcation of 'self' (or 'subject') and 'person' that this entails is deeply important. It makes possible a radical form of alienation from the past and future of the human being one 'is,' the human animal who shares your name, stares at you from old photos and with luck will one day cash out your pension fund. It's possible to know that this human being is intimately connected with you in a way that makes you the bearer of her projects and responsible for her liabilities, and yet not feel like he or she is *you* in a deeper phenomenal sense.

Strawson is not the only philosopher to notice this gap. Indeed, this split between my present-tense subjective sense of self and the diachronic person that I am is pointed to in various ways by several of the living philosophers discussed in this book. We'll see in Chapter 7 that it appears in the distinction between minimal (or core) and narrative (or autobiographical) selves that we find in contemporary cognitive science and the strand of phenomenological philosophy of mind that it informs. I'll be linking it to Kierkegaard's occasional and oblique talk of a 'naked self' distinct from the concrete, historical person that one is. And it also occurs in the signally important, if enormously different, projects of Marya Schechtman and Derek Parfit, which we'll be discussing here. Both Schechtman and Parfit offer accounts of what it is like to become alienated from our past and our future, recognizing it as *our* past or future in one sense while strongly disidentifying with it in another sense. In both cases, I know full well that the person I remember being is causally continuous with the human person I am, and yet I cannot help but feel that person is *not me*.



Those philosophers who have noted this gap between intellectual and affective identification have responded to it in different ways. Some have simply denied that the gap is a real one or have downplayed the reality of alienation. Others, such as Strawson and Parfit, have taken alienation to just be a brute fact that poses no particular problems: for Parfit, awareness of this gap should simply show us that there is no deep fact of personal identity to care about, while for Strawson, as we've seen, Episodics get along just fine in both psychological and ethical terms. Others have felt that this gap does indeed present a problem to be solved, not merely a fact to be described. Schechtman is concerned to show how psychologically helpful it is to identify affectively with as much of one's past and future as possible: life simply goes better for us when we are not emotionally cut off from our histories.

In this chapter, we'll once again be bringing Kierkegaard into this discussion. Kierkegaard, as I hope to show over the course of Chapters 6, 7, and 8, is both aware of the perspectival gap that Strawson, Schechtman, Parfit, Zahavi, Damasio, and Johnston are working with, and like Schechtman he sees this gap as something we should overcome. However, the force of that 'should' is considerably greater for Kierkegaard. Appropriating our past and future is not simply a matter of living a more pleasant life or of overcoming uncomfortable cognitive dissonance for Kierkegaard. Rather, it is a requirement imposed upon us by soteriology. Like Locke, Kierkegaard links a concerned appropriation of one's past (and future) to an understanding of identity that is ultimately eschatological: we are to identify with our past because that is what I, the subject having this experience right now, will ultimately answer for. And for better or worse, that gives Kierkegaard's account of affective identification a thoroughness—one might say a pitilessness—that contemporary neo-Lockean accounts of identity cannot match.

## 'The Past Is Another Country; They Do Things differently there'

That well-worn epigram to L. P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*, already alluded to in Chapter 2, captures something of the strangeness that sometimes creeps into our memories of the past. For all James' talk of the 'warmth and intimacy' of episodic memory, the remembered past can often seem decidedly foreign. So it is no surprise that the sense of alienation from the selves we encounter in memory and anticipation that Strawson describes in a somewhat extreme form is well attested in literature. Strawson invokes Henry James' letter to the novelist Rhoda Broughton: 'I think of it, the masterpiece in question, as the work of quite another person than myself, at this date—that of a rich (so much rather than a poor) relation, say, who hasn't cast me off in my trouble, but suffers me still to claim a shy fourth cousinship.'<sup>1</sup> Mark Johnston

<sup>1</sup> James 1999, pp.562–3; see Strawson 2009, p.328.

(who as we'll see is also a key proponent of the self/person split) similarly discusses Jorge Luis Borges' dramatic experience of such alienation:

The other one, the one called Borges, is the one things happen to . . . I know of Borges from the mail and see his name on a list of professors or in a biographical dictionary. I like hourglasses, maps, eighteenth-century typography, the taste of coffee and the prose of Stevenson; he shares these preferences, but in a vain way that turns them into the attributes of an actor . . . I am destined to perish, definitively, and only some instant of myself can survive in him. Little by little, I am giving over everything to him, though I am quite aware of his perverse custom of falsifying and magnifying things. . . . I shall remain in Borges, not in myself (if it is true that I am someone), but I recognize myself less in his books than in many others or in the laborious strumming of a guitar. . . . Thus my life is a flight and I lose everything and everything belongs to oblivion, or to him. I do not know which of us has written this page.<sup>2</sup>

The narrator here is, if you like, Borges\*, who is aware of, but does not take himself to *be*, the person who goes by the name of Borges. Borges\* has essentially a third-personal relationship to Borges. That's an extreme case, but most of us can probably find analogues to these literary forms of self-alienation in our own experiences of memory—particularly memories from early childhood which can have a strange air of unreality and ambiguous identity about them. Kierkegaard himself describes this in a charming journal entry from 1838:

When I stand so and look and look over Røyen's old place deep into Hestehaven, and the forest thickens densely in the background, the shadow and secrecy accentuated even more with the isolated trunks on which only crowns have grown—then I seem vividly to see myself as a little boy running off in my green jacket and gray pants—but, alas, I have grown older and cannot *catch up with myself* [*indhente mig selv*]. Grasping childhood is like grasping a beautiful region as one rides in a carriage looking backward; one only becomes properly aware of the beauty at that moment, at that very instant when it begins to disappear, and all I have left of that happy time is *crying like a child*. (KJN 1, 248/SKS 17, 257; DD 122.a)

In their translation of the *Journals*, Howard and Edna Hong render *indhente mig selv* as 'fetch myself'; *indhente* without the reflexive also means 'obtain' or 'gather.' Kierkegaard is here complaining that he has grown too old to catch the running child (despite only being in his mid-twenties!), but in a deeper sense, he is mourning the sense in which he cannot appropriate that child to himself. His encomium on the beauty of lost youth involves a sense of disconnection from that little boy *despite recognizing his causal continuity with him*. This isn't as extreme as what Borges, James, and Episodics describe, but it seems to be on the same spectrum of alienation from past and future stages in the career of the psycho-socio-physical entity, the human animal, known as 'Søren Aabye Kierkegaard'. And it too relies on a gap between the extension of consciousness back into time and the appropriation of what we find there.

<sup>2</sup> Borges 2000, pp.282–3. Johnston's discussion is in Johnston 2010, pp.149–50, 205–6. For an extended philosophical discussion, see Perry 2007.

The sort of alienation that Kierkegaard describes here does not, on its face, appear to have any evaluative dimension. He is simply struck by the alterity, the irrecoverability, of that child and its milieu. Deep-past memories do sometimes have an air of alienness about them, but that unfamiliarity doesn't seem to be charged with any tone of disapproval or rejection. (Equally, there is an experience of *familiarity* with the past, as when we hear a long-forgotten song or see an item we remember from childhood—though even here, there is a sort of uncanny surprise built into the experience.) Other forms of alienation in memory, however, are more reflexively evaluative. Think of the experience of seeing old photographs of yourself. Sometimes we're simply struck by difference ('I was so thin back then!'), but sometimes we also react in a way that involves a sort of active disavowal ('I can't believe I wore those flannel shirts all through the nineties! What was I thinking?').

The latter can take a more thoroughgoing form, in which we do not merely react negatively to some aspect of our past selves but respond with a more global rejection of our past or future selves: 'That wasn't me!' or 'I'm no longer that person!' We disidentify with the past or future person-stage in such a comprehensive way that we see them as, in some sense, being someone else—but in *what* sense? We might think of these disavowals as merely metaphorical, as Anthony Rudd does for instance,<sup>3</sup> or as merely speaking 'hyperbolically', as Goldie sees them, 'just as it is when I step out of the shower saying that I feel like a new man'.<sup>4</sup> Parfit thinks that statements like 'I'm no longer that person' go to the sort of qualitative identity that psychologists are interested in, but not the numerical identity that philosophers are concerned about—and that it's numerical identity that's in play when we discuss things like survival.<sup>5</sup> Parfit notes that while 'I may believe that, after my marriage, I shall be a different person', this fact 'does not make marriage death'.<sup>6</sup> And yet, if we do stick to numerical identity, there is a sense in which, according to Parfit's reductionist position (echoing the Buddhist *annata*, 'no-self' doctrine) these disavowals are ultimately neither true nor false: I'm no longer that past person because there was never any 'me' in a deep sense to begin with. There are just a set of physical and psychological properties, a Humean bundle; asking whether it's still 'you' or not is just a shorthand way of asking whether these properties have persisted in certain, ultimately conventional, ways.

To consider what is happening in these forms of alienation and how we should understand these disavowals, we'll now turn to two figures of temporal alienation offered in the literature, one future-directed, one past-directed.

<sup>3</sup> Rudd 2012, p.211, n.38.

<sup>4</sup> Goldie 2012, p.145. Goldie links this to the sense in which 'life and death go with the basic sense' of survival (p.140), though as we'll see, we even have ways of anticipating our death in which we don't see it as *really us* who will die. Goldie would insist in such cases that we don't think we *literally* won't die, but as we'll see shortly, I think such disidentifications are more than merely metaphorical or hyperbolic.

<sup>5</sup> Parfit 2011, p.420.

<sup>6</sup> Parfit 2011, p.420.

## The Nineteenth-century Russian

We'll begin with a future-directed example of alienation: Derek Parfit's 'Nineteenth-century Russian.' Parfit envisions a young Russian aristocrat (hereafter the 'Young Russian'), who has not yet inherited his father's estates. Having become a committed socialist, he intends to give his land to the local peasantry as soon as he inherits. But it will likely be many years before this will happen, and he realizes that by the time his father dies, his revolutionary zeal will have faded and he will have become more conservative—and less willing to give away his land. Disturbed by this prospect, he has a legal document drawn up that will automatically transfer ownership of the land to the peasants as soon as he inherits. The document is structured so that he himself cannot countermand it; the only person who can do so is his wife. He begs of her that, when the time comes, she will help him frustrate the interests of his older, reactionary self: 'I regard my ideals as essential to me. If I lose these ideals, I want you to think that I cease to exist. I want you to regard your husband then, not as me, the man who asks you for this promise, but only as his corrupted later self. Promise me that you would not do what he asks.'<sup>7</sup>

Parfit puts forward this example in a discussion of what his reductionist view of personal identity does to the holding of commitments. In that context, many of the philosophically interesting questions are actually to be found on the wife's side of the experience, such as problems about moral autonomy,<sup>8</sup> and whether the example suggests we should give greater force to someone's earlier commitments or to their capacity to change their mind. When the future arrives, so to speak, and the wife confronts the moral force of her earlier commitment to the Young Russian not to rescind the contract in the face of the Older Russian's entreaties, how should she respond? Joel Feinberg argues she would be right to ignore the Older Russian's pleas and stick to her earlier commitment to the Young Russian,<sup>9</sup> while Jennifer Radden thinks she should accede to his request to rescind the contract, because: 'Our ability to entertain second thoughts, to reconsider, adapt and change direction in the light of a new piece of information, or a telling experience, is deeply bound up with what makes us autonomous human beings.'<sup>10</sup> Unlike Ulysses, chained to the mast and enthralled to the Sirens' song, the Older Russian is fully in his right mind and not suffering from coercion (including the coercive effects of excessive pain or pleasure); he's simply changed his mind on the basis of changes in his values and attitudes, and we should, according to Radden, respect his capacity to do so. But we can only change our minds if it's the same 'we' before and after the change.

When the Older Russian says he releases his wife from her earlier commitment, identity thus becomes decisively important: is the Older Russian the man to whom

<sup>7</sup> Parfit 1984, p.327.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Kleinig 2009, pp.99–101.

<sup>9</sup> Feinberg 1986, p.86.

<sup>10</sup> Radden 1994, p.792. For further thoughts on the Russian, see Davenport 2012, pp.36–7.

she made the commitment and therefore entitled to release her from it? Or is what the Young Russian claimed correct: anyone who would ask her to countermand the document is *not* the Young Russian? If so, notes Parfit, 'she can never be released from her commitment. The self to whom she is committed would, in trying to release her, cease to exist.'<sup>11</sup> This looks very much like a metaphysical problem, but, Parfit tells us, it admits of no real metaphysical answer: determinations of personal identity don't track any 'deep' features of the situation and are therefore largely conventional. We can make context-bound judgements as to whether the young man is the same self or a different self, but there is no underlying metaphysical 'fact of the matter' to make those judgements for us.

But these metaphysical problems don't become (fully) operative until what, from the perspective of the Young Russian, is the fairly distant future. From the *Young Russian's* perspective, things are different—because, as Radden notes, 'The 'subjective' perspective is temporally bounded: it is the perspective not only of here, but of NOW.'<sup>12</sup> Looking forward from that perspective, the Young Russian would know that *a* mind will be changed without any sense that *his* mind will be changed. Radden deliberately sidesteps having to make any claims about discontinuity of personal identity here, while Allen Buchanan calls the claim that we should regard the Young Russian and the Older Russian as separate people 'as unconvincing as it is gratuitous'.<sup>13</sup> Part of the reason commentators have found the claim that personal identity doesn't hold between the Young and Older Russian so unpersuasive is precisely because it is a first-person, perspectively bound (and thus temporally bound) report about how identity claims seem *to the Young Russian now* in prospect. What possible bearing, a metaphysically inclined reader might ask, do the Young Russian's anticipatory attitudes (or, for that matter, the Older Russian's recollective attitudes) have on whether he *is* the same self? Simon Beck sums this attitude up in stark terms: 'That the Russian *says* he would not survive is neither here nor there; if *Parfit insisted* that we should see it that way—and he does not—that would make the case no stronger. Any strength would lie only in its demanding the intuitive response that the Russian does not survive, and it does not even begin to do that.'<sup>14</sup> If we're serious metaphysicians looking for some *matter of fact* here, how things *seem* to the Young Russian (or the Older Russian for that matter) is utterly inconsequential. After all, all that Parfit is trying to do with the example is show that there is *nothing more* to identity than

<sup>11</sup> Parfit 1984, p.328.

<sup>12</sup> Radden 1994, p.799. As I hope will become clear in the following chapters, I take this point to be decisive to understanding Kierkegaard's account of selfhood; indeed I think it is irreducibly important to *any* discussion of personal identity. On this point, see Stokes 2013b; Stokes 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Buchanan 1988, p.289. Buchanan further points out (p.290) that if the Young Russian and the Older Russian really are two different people, then the Russian's wife is actually in no moral quandary: the Older Russian is simply claiming that he has a right to the Younger Russian's property, which, if he is not the same person, he doesn't. I think, as may become clear over the course of this chapter, this claim insufficiently differentiates between *person-identity* and *self-identity*.

<sup>14</sup> Beck 2008, p.75.

psychological continuity or connectedness across time; and even if we accepted this, we could make the assessment that such connectedness fails to hold between the Young and Older Russians quite independently of any first-personal reports from either one of them.

I suspect the reason commentators like Beck react so contemptuously to the claim that the Young Russian and the Older Russian are not identical is precisely that they take objective metaphysics to be the whole story about personal identity. As Beck notes,<sup>15</sup> apparently self-reflexive emotions such as embarrassment can involve a sense of repudiation of my past self's motives and concerns (as we'll discuss in relation to Schechtman) yet they remain reflexive precisely *because* I realize that *I* did this regrettable thing. Hence Beck, taking aim at Schechtman's reading of the Nineteenth-century Russian, claims that 'as an intuition pump in support of the claim that continuity of personality is necessary for survival, the story of the Russians is worse than unconvincing'<sup>16</sup> and that Parfit never intended it as such in any case. But Beck misses what is really important about the Russians. The Young Russian fully acknowledges his objective psychological continuity with the Older Russian; it's precisely *because* he foresees such a causal psychological sequence unfolding that the Young Russian sees a need to frustrate the actions of his future self. His future self is *perspectivally accessible* to him: the Older Russian presents himself in imaginative anticipation to the Young Russian as a person whose perspective he *will* come to occupy, and one day the Young Russian will present himself in memory to the Older Russian as a person whose perspective he *did* occupy. Yet the Young Russian's relation to the Older Russian completely lacks egocentric concern. It's not that the Russian is horrified that *he*, the self he feels himself to be now, will change so much, but more that it seems to him as if some *other*, future person will intervene to frustrate his interests of the person he now is. In other words, the complete lack of what Schechtman labels 'empathic access', the ability to identify with the emotions, concerns, and dispositions of his far-future self, means the Russian does not experience himself as being the same *self* as a being whose perspective is nonetheless fully first-personally available to him given their causal connection.<sup>17</sup> This wouldn't be a problem if we could dismiss cases like the Nineteenth-century Russian as exceptional or pathological. But self-alienation of this sort is more pervasive than we might imagine; the Nineteenth-century Russian stands at the far end of a continuum of

<sup>15</sup> Beck 2008, pp.75–6.

<sup>16</sup> Beck 2008, p.78.

<sup>17</sup> Schechtman 2003. Jan Branson brings Velleman's work on notional and actual subjects (cf. Chapter 3) and Schechtman together here, arguing that 'the unselfconscious access the actual subject is supposed to have to the perspective of the notional subject is part of the phenomenology of memory and intention only if it is backed up by the actual subject's empathic access to the notional subject's perspective... empathic access in Schechtman's sense is a requirement for unselfconscious access in Velleman's sense.' Only perspectives that are 'characteristically "colored" by the subject's stance toward the world and himself as agent' are susceptible to the sort of unselfconscious co-identity Velleman describes—a view which in some ways seems to be pushing in a similar direction to the one I here ascribe to Kierkegaard. Branson 2008, p.104.

experiences which includes more localized and less radical forms of alienation. What the thought-experiment demonstrates, somewhat against Parfit's own intentions, is that our subjective, phenomenally figured sense of identity and our objective sense of our extension across time can come apart.

Commentators like Beck can't take that point seriously because they take it that metaphysics is the only game in town, or at least the only one that matters: metaphysics determines what we *really* are, how we happen to feel about things does not. What they miss, and what Kierkegaard is well placed to show us, is that personal identity is not simply a matter of objective continuity, but of how our subjective sense of self interacts with our awareness of that objective continuity. The estranged Russians bring to salience the question of how a *self*, the being that we experience ourselves as being here and now, appropriates a *person*, a physical/psychological being that is spread out across time. This question is not subsidiary to the question of personal identity, but integral to it; we cannot understand selfhood, I contend, if we ignore this sense of subjective, first-personal appropriation.

As we've seen, Strawson envisions the same gap between awareness of my person-continuity and my\* appropriation thereof, but doesn't see such appropriation as morally or psychologically normative. Before we get to Kierkegaard's account of why such normativity matters, let's now consider a past-directed analogue to the Nineteenth-century Russian, one which embeds a claim that appropriating the past is, at least, a psychologically healthy thing to do.

## Schechtman's Matrons

In building on her Narrative View of personal identity, Schechtman has offered a past-directed example to bookend this future-directed Russian example:<sup>18</sup>

Imagine a carefree and wild young woman who eventually settles down into a solid career, a marriage and motherhood. Growing into the responsibilities these life changes require, she may well change drastically. Her concerns about juggling her time, sorting out child care arrangements, getting the mortgage check in the mail, and framing her report in a way that will reflect well on the company will be a far cry from the old concerns about juggling dates, finding the most exciting parties, and initiating adventures. The responsible matron is going to think, feel and act quite differently from the party girl, and when her old friends try to drag her out for a night of revelry she might reply that the wild friend they knew is no more. The present woman does not care about the same things as the party girl, she does not have the capacity for witty bar chatter, nor the uncanny ability to locate parties. Her sleep patterns are different as are her thought patterns. She is, in many respects, a different subject in the same body.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Though as she further notes, in one sense the Nineteenth Century Russian is *really* about memory rather than anticipation, for the young Russian is concerned that in the future he will not share the views of the self he is *now*, not that he *now* doesn't share his older self's views. Schechtman 2003, p.253.

<sup>19</sup> Schechtman 2003, pp.240–1.

There are three different iterations of this 'matron':

- The *Serious Matron* remembers her wild past but 'she cannot recapture the passions, emotions, likes and dislikes that she once felt;' while she can understand how *someone* might find her former passions and desires motivating, she 'is so alienated from those desires and passions that she cannot quite comprehend how *she* could have made those choices'.<sup>20</sup> Her past desires play no role in how she lives her daily life.
- The *Less Serious Matron* now has different priorities to the party girl but retains an affectively rich sense of what drove the party girl and still finds her passions and desires compelling. To that extent her past passions are still affectively and behaviourally alive in her, though to a lesser degree than in the past.
- The *Mortified Matron* has vivid recall of the experiences of the party girl, but 'has altered in such a way that these recollections fill her with shame and disgust'.<sup>21</sup> She does not merely fail to endorse her past passions and desires (as in the case of the serious matron) but repudiates them.

What distinguishes these matrons is the degree to which they maintain 'empathic access': a 'deep, phenomenological relation between different portions of a life' that goes beyond mere cognitive memory,<sup>22</sup> an ability to relate to the conative and affective states of a past person-stage with a degree of sympathy and vividness. This is present to a reasonable degree with the Less Serious Matron, whereas the Serious Matron seems to be almost entirely lacking in empathic access and the Mortified Matron is in a position strongly analogous to the Young Russian. The Serious and Mortified Matrons are aware of the causal history of psychological development that link them to the Party Girl—they maintain memory-access to that past, without which their survival as persons might be too radically compromised<sup>23</sup>—but are so affectively alienated from the party girl that they experience the party girl as if she was *someone else*. There are, as Goldie argues, problems with this view: for one thing it involves a 'two-state model' whereby we recollect the state of mind of our past person-stage and then form a reactive attitude to it, whereas memory may in fact be more constructive than this: we simply remember our past indifferently (Serious Matron) or with repulsion (Mortified Matron), and so 'the very idea of having direct epistemic access to one's past, involving memories unalloyed by what one now knows and how one now feels, becomes fundamentally suspect'.<sup>24</sup>

In the paper in which she introduces the Matrons, Schechtman is simply concerned with the extent to which empathic access constitutes (or more accurately is *evidence of*, though Schechtman doesn't put it in these terms—and Goldie raises important questions about its evidentiary value as to the persistence of psychological traits)<sup>25</sup> sufficient psychological continuity to preserve identity across time. But she is

<sup>20</sup> Schechtman 2003, p.245.

<sup>23</sup> Schechtman 2004, p.89.

<sup>21</sup> Schechtman 2003, p.250.

<sup>24</sup> Goldie 2012, p.134.

<sup>22</sup> Schechtman 2007, p.166.

<sup>25</sup> Goldie 2012, p.137–40.



already working explicitly with a distinction between two different kinds of identity. When someone declares 'I'm no longer that person' we might be tempted to say that this is *merely* metaphorical and that she is *really* the same person. But this is, according to Schechtman, too hasty: the 'thicker'<sup>26</sup> sense of identity which we might dismiss as merely figurative—the sort of identity the Mortified Matron and the Young Russian disavow—is in fact central to discussions of personal identity as it is 'deeply intermeshed with the many significant practical implications of personal continuation such as morality, self-interested concern, autonomy and authenticity'.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, I think we can go considerably further than Schechtman does at this point. In developing his own Kierkegaardian account of personal identity, Anthony Rudd has noted that while people *say* things like 'I was a different person then', 'nearly all of them would agree that they didn't mean that *literally*... The sense of difference, of change, is there; but so is the recognition that, for all of that, "the [past person-stage] ... was me".'<sup>28</sup> What makes these instances of psychological change striking, on this view, *just is* that they have occurred to the same person. But Schechtman is right, I think, to point to just how significant the sense of non-identification due to affective alienation really is. It may fall somewhere short of being literally true, but it is not quite merely metaphorical either. Can we make sense of a proposition's being more than metaphorically true without being true in a literal sense?

One possibility is suggested by David Kangas, who identifies in Kierkegaard's work a class of tropes that he refers to as 'absolute figures'. Kangas' example is 'gift' as Kierkegaard uses the term in his 1843 discourses on the theme 'every good gift and every perfect gift is from above' (James 1:17). This statement, for Kierkegaard, is 'not a metaphor [*Billede*, image, picture] but the only actual and true' expression (EUD, 134/SKS 5, 137). On Kangas' reading, 'gift' (as well as the figure of God as 'father') functions in these discourses as 'neither a metaphor nor a concept but a third thing that precedes the opposition between the two'. This third thing is an 'absolute figure', a 'figural meaning for which there is no corresponding and opposing proper meaning'.<sup>29</sup> A figure or metaphor ultimately exists in order to be discarded, for once we grasp the concept it represents the metaphor itself becomes unreal, *merely* figurative. Absolute figures, by contrast, *are* figurative, but they are not *figurative of* anything more proper'.<sup>30</sup> They also tend to end in aporia or paradox, for example, 'God in giving already has given'. Such absolute figures, for Kangas, allow us to glimpse truths that are inaccessible from within the usual meanings designated by language, truths that are essentially connected to personal *upbuilding*.

<sup>26</sup> Schechtman 2004, p.92.

<sup>27</sup> Schechtman 2003, p.244.

<sup>28</sup> Rudd 2012, p.211, n.38.

<sup>29</sup> Kangas 2000, p.101. For a related claim see also Evans 2006, p.112: 'What is implied is that picturing Jesus as God's son does more justice to the truth than any other image we might employ. While no human language may be perfectly adequate to capture the mystery of Jesus' oneness with God, the person who uses the traditional language is coming as close to the truth as finite human beings can.'

<sup>30</sup> Kangas 2000, p.111.

Without needing to explore the Hegelian onto-theology that Kangas takes Kierkegaard to be working against here, I think the notion of ‘absolute figures’ helps us to understand a little better the status of a statement like ‘I am no longer the person I was’. Such a statement already involves us in paradox—if we take it that ‘the person I was’ *must be* me—and seems to end in the aporia that I both am and am not the self I remember being. The Young Russian, for instance, is horrified at the self he will become precisely because that self is not him. And the claim that ‘I am not that person’ is not, I suggest, a metaphor *for* being especially affectively alienated from a past person-stage. The expression is not an analogy we are meant to swap out for some more literal, more fundamental meaning. Rather, it represents a real, irreducible dimension of our experience of personal identity. We understand this claim best when, instead of trying to reduce it to other claims that are consistent with a more ‘literal’ conception of identity, we allow it to stand on its own. Personal identity now becomes not merely *one* type of identity ascription, but two: one linked to more objective forms of continuity such as bodily re-identification, and one grounded in affective (dis-)identification.

We’ve already encountered, in Strawson, this distinction between the diachronically extended human being (whose identity conditions are at least theoretically knowable publicly) and a self or subject who may or may not experience a phenomenal sense of connection with the past and future stages of the career of that human being. By the time of her 2007 paper, Strawson’s challenge has pushed Schechtman to see this split as inherent in her own narrativist project, as indicated by the two senses of identity revealed by her Matrons:

I am increasingly convinced that the concept of person as used by psychological theorists mixes together two components. One is Strawson’s notion of the self; the other is a practical notion that is more intimately connected to social context. On the one hand a person is conceived as the subject of experiences, the ‘I’ that we experience as a psychological entity with persistence conditions distinct from human beings. On the other hand, a person is conceived as the bearer of certain complex social capacities that carry important practical implications.<sup>31</sup>

The identity and persistence conditions of the *person* and the *self* can be quite different, as the Russian and Matron (and the Episodic) demonstrate. And as Schechtman notes, this marks something of a departure from Locke, who despite drawing crucial distinctions between animal identity, substance/soul identity, and personal identity, still ‘sees the kind of continuity of experiencing subject that defines the persistence of the self as the precondition for the capacities that make someone a person’.<sup>32</sup> This conflation has continued right to the end of the twentieth century—but now, thanks to writers like Schechtman, Strawson, and others, it appears to be breaking down.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Schechtman 2007, p.169.

<sup>32</sup> Schechtman 2007, p.169.

<sup>33</sup> Alfonso Muñoz Corcuera’s (2013) recent dissertation further develops the self-person distinction (also differentiating ‘human’ and ‘person’ in ways that differ from the way I use these terms here) and situates it within the history of personal identity discussions in helpful and productive ways.

On Schechtman's model, the constitution of the person—roughly what had initially appeared to be 'literal' identity above—comes to be seen as the weaker sense of identity, but the more indispensable: 'One need not identify deeply with past or future actions or experiences, care about them, or take an interest in them, but one does need to recognize them as relevant to one's options in certain fundamental ways.'<sup>34</sup> I may not feel like I *truly am* that past person anymore, but I can't get out of paying his parking fines. The stronger sense of identity, however, requires that past events 'must condition the quality of present experience in the strongest sense, unifying consciousness over time through affective connections and identification'.<sup>35</sup> All this is basically consonant and compatible with the way Strawson handles this self/person or me\*/GS split.

The opening of this split, however, generates a further question: is this distinction *a problem*? Does this fissure between person and self need to be healed—and if so, from where does that need arise? This is where Strawson and Schechtman part ways. We've seen that Strawson sees no real problem in the split between self and person or I\* and GS. On his view, the Episodic is capable of living as psychologically and ethically rich a life as a Diachronic. Schechtman, like many of Strawson's critics, does however think we have good reasons to try to unify self and person—to try to identify with as much of our past and future as possible, to be more like the Less Serious Matron than her less empathic matronly counterparts. The affective attitudes of the Matrons is initially presented as being more or less a brute psychological fact: the Serious Matron had simply changed so much she no longer has empathic access with her past. In the revised version, however, we are told that 'there are advantages to making one's self-narrative coincide as far as possible with one's person-narrative'.<sup>36</sup> Doing so, Schechtman claims, actually serves to lengthen the duration of our selves (or I\*s), and 'lives that encourage affective and emotional identification with the past and future instead of resting with mere cognitive awareness of what one did and projections of what one might do are often made richer and smoother through this effort'.<sup>37</sup> If so, that gives us prudential reasons to try to identify with as much of our physical, biological, and interpersonal past and future as possible.

But these reasons are, she admits, defeasible. It is *generally* desirable to make one's affective sense of self coextensive with one's person-narrative, but not always; 'There may be circumstances in which it is better for a life to include radical affective breaks within it. Sometimes it can be a good idea to put the past behind us or the future out of play'.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, these merely psychological reasons are in trouble the moment an Episodic turns up and reports living a perfectly happy life despite not identifying affectively with their past and future person-stages. This compels Schechtman to point beyond a merely psychological normativity: 'To develop my idea into an argument for the desirability of making person and self coextensive, then, it will be

<sup>34</sup> Schechtman 2007, p.170.

<sup>37</sup> Schechtman 2007, p.177.

<sup>35</sup> Schechtman 2007, p.171.

<sup>38</sup> Schechtman 2007, p.176.

<sup>36</sup> Schechtman 2007, p.176.

necessary to develop a notion of alienation that is not strictly psychological in the way an introspective report will reveal.<sup>39</sup>

What this ‘not strictly psychological’ account of alienation will consist in is not elaborated upon. Two possibilities present themselves, however. The first would involve some deeper psychological account in which we show that the Episodic is not *really* happy, or not as happy as she could be. This seems possible, but again it would likely yield only defeasible reasons to extend one’s identification to more or less of the past (which is not necessarily an objection in itself). The second is to move from a ‘merely’ psychological normativity to an ethical one. And this latter possibility seems more closely allied to the sort of ‘ownership’ we expect in certain morally charged contexts.

Consider again our Mortified Matron. This Matron, on Schechtman’s line, lacks the empathic access which would secure a psychologically advantageous affective identification with her past. Her life would be ‘richer and smoother’ if she wasn’t periodically wracked with pangs of embarrassment and horror at the things she got up to in her younger days. Yet she is not Episodic by any means: rather, as I argued in Chapter 4, her horror that *she* did these things and had these passions and motives is precisely what her affective identification with her past *consists in*. She extends her self-identity to past person-stages in a way that is far from pleasant, but that is nonetheless somehow indexed to her sense that *she* is responsible for these things. Now imagine a reformed criminal in the dock, declaring that ‘I’m no longer that person!’ If this declaration expresses a subjective state like that of the mortified matron, then we would say that the criminal is reformed, yet remains remorseful in a way that suggests they have fully taken ownership of their past. She understands in the *fullest* sense what it means that *she* did these things in the past. If, however, the reformed criminal’s situation is more like that of the serious matron—a lack of subjective identification that takes the form of affective *indifference* to her past—then we might say that the criminal simply hasn’t fully taken ownership for what she has done. And as we saw previously, something *does* seem to be lacking in the latter response. To account for this, we’ll need to look for an understanding of our *ethical* relationship to the past and future that makes such affective identification normative, even in circumstances where it won’t make life more pleasant.

## Soteriology and Transmission Loss

I’ve mentioned that the problem of affective alienation never arises in Locke’s picture of personal identity, which is perhaps why its significance (if any) for neo-Lockean theories has been so contested. Whilst Locke does use ‘person’ in a way that is more intersubjective and more closely connected to moral imputability than the way he

<sup>39</sup> Schechtman 2007, p.177.

uses 'self', he nonetheless ultimately takes these two terms to be coterminous, and so assumes that extension of consciousness and what I earlier called 'concernful remembering' always go together. As we've seen, he did grapple with the question of my identity with past person-stages whose experience I *cannot* recall (such as in cases of drunkenness and sleepwalking), yet he seems to assume that any experience I *can* recall, that is, one that is perspectively accessible to me, is the experience of a self I am concerned for by default. In that case, Kierkegaard *just is* the child in the green jacket and grey pants he cannot catch up with—though it's interesting to ask what Locke would have made of the apparent observer-memory perspective of that memory.

For Locke, we find ourselves to be diachronically extended selves insofar as we are beings 'sensible of Happiness or Misery' who therefore 'must grant, that there is something that is *himself* that he is concerned for'.<sup>40</sup> But what then circumscribes the boundaries of that for which we are concerned? We saw in Chapter 1 that this was a problem for Locke in that if we link moral imputability to extension of consciousness, it looks very much like we are not morally responsible for anything we cannot remember doing. In response to this problem, Locke appealed to eschatology, to 'the great Day, wherein the Secrets of all Hearts shall be laid open' on which 'no one shall be made to answer for what he knows nothing of; but shall receive his Doom, his Conscience accusing or excusing him'.<sup>41</sup> So, as we've seen, while Locke takes extension of consciousness as constitutive of selfhood, there is also some fact of the matter about what we are responsible for which is at least partially obscured for us (now) by forgetfulness. Given that concern is linked to an imputability that is ultimately soteriologically ('fatally') important, this suggests we *should* be concerned with as much of our *actual* scope of responsibility as possible. Hence the existence of a soteriological fact-of-the-matter about personal identity creates a reason to extend our conscious concernment to align with this fact. However, because Locke assumes that concernment just attends consciousness automatically as an 'unavoidable concomitant', this normative issue never arises for him: if we remember something, then we automatically appropriate it to the self whose happiness we are concerned for, and if we cannot remember something, we are presumably not responsible for not appropriating it.

This automatic character of appropriation also leaves no room for degrees. Whereas modern neo-Lockeans worry about the effect of gradations of psychological change on personal survival, Locke seems to take identity to be largely immune from the ravages of time, whatever changes these might have wrought on the person's dispositional and affective states:

Consciousness, as far as it ever can be extended, should it be to Ages past, unites Existences and Actions, very remote in Time, into the same Person, as well as it does the Existence and Actions

<sup>40</sup> Locke 1975, p.345.

<sup>41</sup> Locke 1975, p.344.

of the immediately preceding Moment: So that whatever has the Consciousness of present and past Actions, is the same person to whom they both belong.<sup>42</sup>

In passages such as this, Locke does not seem to allow *degrees* of identity; appropriation is not scalar but absolute, and so personal identity does not suffer what we might call ‘transmission loss’ across time.<sup>43</sup> However far I can extend my consciousness, I still find myself completely there when I get there, so to speak. Conversely, the strand of the neo-Lockean tradition that culminates in the reductionism of Parfit sees personal identity as wholly scalar and as utterly plagued by this transmission loss of selfhood. By the time the Young Russian has become the crusty old conservative, there simply won’t be enough of his current psychology left for us to be able to say he *is* the older man (though Parfit’s point here is that ultimately there *are* no more-than-conventional facts about identity to be found). This is highly problematic if identity is to carry the fairly heavy normative load Locke expected it to, for Locke sees us as responsible for everything our consciousness can extend to, not just the actions that happened within *affectively* accessible sections of our psychological lives. In Locke’s eschatological scenario, the Serious Matron will presumably still be called to account for any misdeeds of the Party Girl, even though she finds herself so affectively alienated from that past that, from her perspective, these misdeeds may as well have been performed by someone else. There is nothing in Locke’s picture to suggest such affective alienation will mitigate this responsibility: ‘But I’m just not that person anymore!’ won’t get her off the hook. Of course, the thought of Doomsday might *itself* give the Matron excellent grounds for concern about that past, whether she *does* care about it or not—but here again we see a schism between the person as object of moral imputability and responsibility, on the one hand, and the self as something that appropriates the past and future to itself through concerned affective identification. Indeed we can see that from this perspective the Mortified Matron is actually in a better position than the Serious Matron, in that the former’s embarrassment looks more like the kind of responsible ownership of the past we discussed in the Chapter 4.

Locke does not address this bifurcation of self-identity and person-identity simply because he does not consider the possibility they *could* fail to be co-extensive, but if we take cases such as the Nineteenth-century Russian and the Matrons seriously we cannot return to Locke’s uncritical certainty on this point. An amended Lockean account of identity would therefore seem to require that the person and the self be *made* co-extensive. And the sort of psychological benefits Schechtman points to in maintaining affective identification cannot reliably motivate such an extension. There may in fact be pressing psychological reasons *not* to maintain empathic access

<sup>42</sup> Locke 1975, p.340.

<sup>43</sup> Here I disagree with Strawson’s assertion that, on the Lockean model of personhood, ‘Consciousness may contain an involuntary natural mechanism that operates somewhat like a statute of limitations’ such that we are let off the hook on the Day of Judgement for certain actions (Strawson 2011a, p.87).

with some parts of our past: preserving a degree of empathy with a phase of life in which I was particularly self-destructive or vicious would certainly seem to run counter to good psychological health, for instance. Accordingly, if the project initiated by Locke were to succeed in its fullest sense—thereby preserving what seems right about that project—it would need to identify a phenomenal experience of becoming ‘self to oneself’ that has the following features: an appropriative form of consciousness that secures a non-scalar identity with all moments of my perspectively accessible life in an intrinsically normative way.

What is needed, it seems, is a sort of phenomenal ‘glue’ to hold together the self that I am now and the selves I access in memory and anticipation, such that my person-identity and self-identity become coextensive.<sup>44</sup> I need to somehow subjectively appropriate all those moments in the life of the human being I am and for whose actions I am morally accountable, regardless of massive psychological change. And it is here that we may look to Kierkegaard for resources. Like Locke, Kierkegaard links our sense of ourselves across time to soteriology and final judgement, and rejects the idea that we are somehow less responsible for what we have forgotten or become less responsible due to the passage of time:

It is eternally false that guilt becomes something different even if a century passed by; to say anything like that is to confuse the eternal with what the eternal least resembles, with human forgetfulness [*menneskelig Glemsomhed*]. (UDVS, 18/SKS 8, 133)

For Kierkegaard as for Locke, the soteriological valence of the past suffers no transmission loss across time—but unlike Locke, Kierkegaard is aware of how often we fail to affectively identify with and appropriate the past for which we are answerable, how often concernment fails to hold.

In the remainder of this chapter I wish to outline how key tropes of reflexive cognition in Kierkegaard—contemporaneity, concern, interest, inwardness, earnestness—can help to supply this phenomenological glue. As I hope this will show, looking to Kierkegaard may furnish the neo-Lockean project with useful resources. As I will explain in Chapter 6, however, other aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought work against the standard neo-Lockean project of describing the identity and persistence conditions of a temporally extended psychological object called ‘the self’. I think it would in fact be a misunderstanding of Kierkegaard to try to build a metaphysics out of *samtidighed* or these other terms—but that may not be a reason for neo-Lockeans to desist from doing so. It may be a valid place to depart from Kierkegaard for some readers, having taken what they need from him, even if it’s not where Kierkegaard ultimately wants to take us.

<sup>44</sup> This glue metaphor is also used by Gallagher and Zahavi: ‘Our everyday experiences are normally permeated with a kind of temporal super-glue—they are held together in the very short term by a strong and pragmatically important structure...Memory...with a weaker sort of glue, provides, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, a larger but sometimes less coherent framework for making sense out of our experiences’ Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, p.85.

## Memory, Guilt, and Totality

As the quote from ‘An Occasional Discourse’ (better known as ‘Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing’) above would indicate, Kierkegaard is very much aware of the persistence of memory and the sense in which events in the distant past can present themselves to me as things for which I am fully responsible. Part of this awareness is no doubt coloured by his unusual biography. In a journal entry from 1846 he refers to what appears to be an event in his father’s life: ‘How dreadful the thought of that man who once, as a small boy tending sheep on the Jutland heath, in much suffering, starving and exhausted, stood up on a hill and cursed God—and that man was unable to forget it when he was 82 years old’ (KJN 2, 287/SKS 18, 278; JJ:416). But he is also aware of the phenomenology of memory more generally and the way in which it can bring a sting of moral and indeed soteriological responsibility in its very presentation, as we see from an early journal entry from 1836:

The marvellous way in which something that happened long ago can suddenly leap into the consciousness is really remarkable—for example, the memory of something wrong, something one was scarcely conscious of in the moment of action—a flash of lightening which intimates a great thunderstorm. It does not step forward but actually leaps forward with tremendous power and claims to be heard. And that, broadly speaking, is the way we should understand that passage in the gospels which says that a man will be held accountable on the day of judgment for every improper word he has spoken. (JP 854 [1:390]/SKS 27, 153; Papir 194)

We’ll return to the ‘every improper word’ motif in Chapter 8, but for the moment, note that even at this early stage in Kierkegaard’s work, this thought connects the experience of memory to an unforgivingly thorough soteriological criterion of identity. The subjective experience of memory is already associated with an exhaustive, ‘objective’ criterion of identity linked to moral responsibility. And for Kierkegaard, that association between subjective sense-of-self and the objective diachronic continuity of the human being is not simply a brute psychological fact (as in Strawson) or a psychologically desirable achievement (as in Schechtman) but strongly normative. And hence the sort of transmission loss that seems unavoidable in a neo-Lockean account, where psychological connectedness or continuity *just is* what personal identity consists in, turns out to be inadequate to the reality of moral imputability. ‘Human forgetfulness’ offers no mitigation to ultimate soteriological responsibility—and nor, crucially, does psychological distance, as we see in a journal entry from 1847:

Time is not only what is terrifying for a pers., but it is also what is mollifying; not only is it that which makes his life so strenuous (for what strain can be compared with being an eternal spirit and living years, weeks, hours [?]), it is also what soothes. If you have ever transgressed God’s commandments, then you certainly dared not think of God at that same instant—not even in repentance. But then, after a bit of time had passed during which you had not sinned again, then you gained courage; it was as if your guilt had somehow become somewhat less because it



had been rather a while since then, and in the meanwhile you had not sinned often. For an eternal spirit this apparition does not exist. (KJN 4, 112/SKS 20, 112; NB, 185)

Hence the idea that a subject's responsibility for the past is ameliorated by the passage of time is an artefact of human weakness and 'forgetfulness', one that does not track the underlying facts of moral responsibility. From the perspective of ultimate judgement, 'That was a long time ago!' turns out to be no more exculpatory than the excuse offered by Barabas in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*:

FRIAR BARNADINE: Thou hast committed—

BARABAS: Fornication? But that was in another country; and besides, the wench is dead.<sup>45</sup>

And this is before we get to our capacity to use memory in a self-serving way: 'Everything in the present incites to criticism, but recollection disarms it and permits one to use ideality, not to reject, but to beautify what has gone before' (KJN 2, 241/SKS 18, 261; JJ 367.a).

So it would seem that one who accepts Kierkegaard's soteriological commitments (and as I'll say in Chapter 9, those of us who do not accept them may still find something valid in what Kierkegaard has to say here) has a very good reason to try to identify with their past and future person-stages in the concerned, appropriative way Locke takes to be automatic. We saw in Chapter 1 that Kierkegaard distinguishes between recollection (*erindringen*) as a way of encountering the past that essentially relates it to the remembering self, and memory (*hukommelse*) as a mere supplier of detail about the past that contains no such essential connection to the rememberer. What the quotes above suggest is that the prospect of a final judgement, in which I am answerable for every idle word spoken, every trifling detail about the way I've lived my life, *should* turn *every* act of memory into an act of recollection. Every moment I can remember is a moment for which I am answerable—which is not the same as saying every moment is a moment for which I *will* answer, though Kierkegaard clearly believes we will—and so is a moment I should be particularly concerned about.

This concerned appropriation of the past is of a piece with Kierkegaard's overall preoccupation with self-reflexive modes of cognition. Across a range of texts and in a number of different ways, he explores ways in which we can think of ourselves and the world we engage with that involve implicit self-reference, ways in which our thought can be 'shot through' with subjective concern that nonetheless does not always rise to the level of thematic reflection *about* oneself. Very often Kierkegaard describes these indirectly or negatively, by sketching examples of what it is like to *not* see oneself in these terms. I can only give a brief account of these forms of reflexive cognition here (and do not attempt any sort of identification or reduction of the

<sup>45</sup> Marlowe 1995, p.297 (4.1 l.41–3).

different terms he uses), but hopefully their relevance to the issue of psychological alienation as it occurs in Parfit and Schechtman will be clear.

## Subjectivity, Interest, and Mortality

In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Johannes Climacus spends much of his time reminding his reader that he, the reader, is an existing subject. It might seem surprising that we need to be reminded of such a thing, but as Paul Muench points out, the *Postscript* is written for a very specific audience: a philosophically sophisticated reader who is prone to getting carried away with reflection, and needs to be slowed down and brought back to concrete existence.<sup>46</sup> Such a reader is at risk of falling into the state Climacus calls being 'absent-minded' (*distracte*), a state in which their own status as existing subject falls out of their comportment towards the world and towards the object of their thought.

Kierkegaard uses stories told about the Copenhagen bookseller Salomon Soldin (1774–1837) to illustrate this absent-mindedness in an extreme way. Soldin was so absent-minded, we're told, that when a customer impersonated his voice behind his back, he had to ask his wife 'Rebecca, is it I who is speaking?' (CA, 51/SKS 4, 356).<sup>47</sup> Soldin bumbled along like this in life until the fateful day that 'When he was going to get up in the morning, he was not aware that he was dead' (CUP, 1:167/SKS 7, 155). One can already see in that description the lack of a sort of self-possession or self-appropriation. The speculative philosopher, who attempts to *become* objective, to abstract from the particularities of his embodied existence and thereby assume the voice of pure reason, is no less ridiculous than Soldin: he forgets that he is, inescapably, a human being living in time, situated in a concrete world and hurtling towards the event of his death. The comic contradiction in Soldin is replicated in the person who acts as if in their philosophical activity they have become thought itself, enunciating timeless truths of eternal and unbounded reason, rather than remaining a finite, flawed, subjectively limited creature.

The subjective thinker, by contrast, is 'essentially interested in his own thinking' (CUP, 1:73/SKS 7, 73). His thought is permeated with a non-thematized self-concern; he does not merely think his thought but possesses it in a non-thetic awareness that it 'belongs to the subject and no-one else' (CUP, 1:73/SKS 7, 73). The thought is related in important ways to Judge William's talk in *Either/Or* of a form of self-appropriation through ethical commitment, after which, for the subject, 'every movement he makes is accompanied by a consciousness of responsibility for himself' (EO, 2:248/SKS 3, 237). And it ramifies throughout Kierkegaard's moral psychology, in which there is a standing concern for non-thetic ways of seeing *ourselves* in our imaginative engagements of the past and future, of seeing

<sup>46</sup> Muench 2011, pp.104–10.

<sup>47</sup> For the record, Soldin's wife was actually named Hannah (nee Ruben), not Rebecca (SKS K4, 356).

the future possibilities we actualize.<sup>48</sup> Kierkegaard's various invocations of mirror metaphors are instructive here: as we've already heard, we are to see *ourselves* in 'the Mirror of the Word' of scripture as we're told in *For Self-Examination*, and we're to see *ourselves* in the 'mirror of possibility' and not merely *a human being* as Anti-Climacus urges in *The Sickness Unto Death*. For Climacus, Anti-Climacus, and Kierkegaard more generally, there is a way of envisioning the possibilities we encounter in imagination whereby we truly experience them as *our* possibilities. I can imagine the future in a mere daydreaming way, without really taking ownership of it (as in the case of the wannabe Thoreau discussed in Chapter 3), or I can see the person we imagine in the future *as being me*, investing the imagined future subject of experience with a sense of normatively qualified affective identity.

Perhaps the clearest way to explicate this sense of identification is by considering Climacus' ruminations on mortality.<sup>49</sup> Climacus tells us that while he knows plenty about death—that sulphuric acid is fatal, that the Stoics praised suicide, 'that one can die from such a ludicrous trifle that the most solemn person cannot help laughing at death' and so on (CUP, 1:165/SKS 7, 153–4)—knowing *about* death in this way is not the same thing as *understanding* what it is to die. To understand mortality one must understand the reality of one's *own* mortality: without the first-personal dimension, one does not truly understand the significance and meaning of death. To understand what it is to die it is necessary that I understand that *I* will die—necessary, but not sufficient, for it is not enough to know in a wholly cognitive way that one is going to die, as the outcome of a piece of syllogistic reasoning about the mortality of *Homo sapiens*. To understand my death in that way is to reduce my death to the death of 'a human being in general', a token of the human species, and not the subject I experience myself as being here and now:

If death is always uncertain, if I am mortal, then this means that this uncertainty cannot possibly be understood in general if I am not also such a human being in general. But this I am not.... If, however, the uncertainty of death is something in general, then my dying is also something in general. Perhaps dying is also something in general for systematicians, for absentminded people. For the late bookseller Soldin, dying is said to have been something in general—'When he was going to get up in the morning, he was not aware that he was dead.' But for me, *my* dying is by no means something in general; for others, my dying is some such thing. Nor am *I* for myself some such thing in general; perhaps for others I am some such thing in general. But if the task is to become subjective, then every subject becomes *for himself* exactly the opposite of some such thing in general. (CUP, 1:167/SKS 7, 154–5)

Like Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych, the subjective thinker apprehends his death in a way qualitatively different from the abstract way in which most of us, most of the time, acknowledge our mortality. When we think about our death we frequently fail to

<sup>48</sup> This is the main topic of Stokes 2010a, in which many of the claims made in this section are worked out in greater depth.

<sup>49</sup> For a much fuller treatment of this topic than I can offer here, see Stokes 2013a.

reflexively relate it back to how we are living now: we anticipate that someone with our name, likeness, and relationships will die someday, but do not have the strong reflexive sense that *we* will be the ones to die. Marking the difference this reflexivity makes is difficult, as the propositional content of the thought is exactly the same: 'I will die.' Thinking that thought with genuine reflexivity—what Kierkegaard elsewhere calls thinking the 'earnest thought of death' (TDIO, 75/ SKS 5, 445) in contrast to thinking about death with mere 'mood' (*stemning*)—makes a phenomenological difference to the non-conceptual content of the thought of death, a difference which is therefore not easy to express. The thematic object of the earnest thought of death must be one's *own* death, for 'To think of oneself as dead [*At tænke sig selv død*] is earnestness; to be witness to the death of another is mood'—even if the death you witness is that of your child or beloved (TDIO, 75/ SKS 5, 445). But one can likewise envision one's *own* death in a state of mood rather than earnestness, denuding the thought of our own death of the sense of urgent *for-me-ness* this thought should have—and as we've seen, this *for-me-ness* of death amounts to an experience of phenomenal *contemporaneity with death*.

We can also explicate this difference between earnest and absent-minded ways of thinking about our own death using the distinction between 'self' and 'person' discussed above. As Mark Johnston notes, when we fear our death, what we fear is not that the person will cease to exist—that there will be no person with my appearance, motivations, and commitments in the world to carry out my projects—but that my *self*, this subjective 'arena of presence and action' as he puts it, will be extinct.<sup>50</sup> The absent-minded person, by contrast, thinks of the loss of the *person* but does not understand that the death they envisage is that of their *self*, the being they are right now. Again, this is not a cognitive failure, but a phenomenological one: there just isn't the sense of me (or me\*) being the person who is going to die.

Hopefully by this point the structural analogy between the cases of alienation we've been discussing above and this approach to mortality is reasonably apparent:

- The absent-minded person is aware that a future person-stage who is causally continuous with himself will die, but does not have a full affective sense of the self he experiences himself as being the person who dies;
- The Young Russian is aware that a future person-stage who is causally continuous with himself will hold conservative views, but has a strong affective sense that the self he experiences himself as being now is *not* identical with that Older Russian;
- The Serious Matron is aware that a past person-stage who is causally continuous with herself enjoys parties, and so on, but does not have a full affective sense of the self she experiences herself as being now is identical with that Party Girl.

<sup>50</sup> Johnston 2010, p.175.

In each case, a *full* affective sense of ownership of the past or future person-stage will involve a unification of affective self-identification and cognitive awareness of person-identity across time. And this is precisely what each is lacking: to adopt Anti-Climacus' terms, the Serious Matron does not see *herself* in the fullest sense in the mirror of the past, but merely a *human being*; likewise for the Young Russian, peering into Anti-Climacus' 'mirror of possibility'. Based on the contributions of the previous chapters I think we can say that all three fail to become *contemporaneous*, in Kierkegaard's sense, with their past and future person-stages: they do not envisage the experiences of those person-stages as being *their own* experiences but merely the experiences of a human being to whom they are causally connected.

Viewed through the concept of contemporaneity, the Mortified Matron is a more complex case. We saw in Chapter 4 that in one sense embarrassment is a form of diachronic self-experience, in that to be embarrassed about the past is to experience a negative judgement of *oneself*; one feels the sting of that judgement directly. The Mortified Matron does not appear to be embarrassed on the Party Girl's *behalf*, but rather is embarrassed *by* the Party Girl because she *is* the Party Girl, of whom she has a deeply negative judgement. Interestingly, it does not appear she is embarrassed because *others* are forming a negative view of her past, which has been taken in the literature to be a condition of embarrassment—but not of shame, which is often taken to be possible without the actual presence of an audience.<sup>51</sup> Robert C. Roberts also claims that 'while embarrassment is reflexive like shame, it does not seem to go to the core of the self in the way shame does',<sup>52</sup> whereas the Mortified Matron's response does indeed seem connected to her sense of self in such a way. Embarrassment has also been taken to be less substantial than shame,<sup>53</sup> with shame 'connected with the agent's personal morality in a way in which embarrassment is not'.<sup>54</sup> Regardless of whether mortification, in the Matron's case or in general, should be thought of as embarrassment or as shame, just to the extent that she *is* mortified the Matron seems to have something contemporaneous about her recollection of the Party Girl insofar as she feels the reflexive sting of negative judgement, even though she lacks empathic access to the Party Girl's dispositional life.

For Schechtman, the Mortified Matron could overcome this sting by retaining empathic access to her past. But the reasons this gives her are only psychological: empathic access would simply ease the pain of embarrassment. But what if, by reference to some external standard, the Mortified Matron concludes that she *should* feel embarrassed by her past, however painful this may be? (In which case shame rather than embarrassment might indeed be a better description.) Embarrassment, shame, or perhaps pride, may well be entirely appropriate ways of appropriating

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Taylor 1985, pp.69–76; Deonna, Rodogno and Teroni 2012, pp.115–16 (who also add that embarrassment is linked to *appearing* to be a certain way); Roberts 2003, p.230.

<sup>52</sup> Roberts 2003, p.231.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor 1985, p.69; Roberts 2003, p.230.

<sup>54</sup> Taylor 1985, p.69.

one's past and future on the basis of a normatively grounded self-concern. The criminal *should* feel remorse at their past, not merely affective alienation, as this is part of what it is to understand the moral meaning of the past: of what it is to grasp that *I* did this terrible thing.<sup>55</sup>

For Climacus, this normative self-concern is grounded in soteriology: the subject's interest in his own thinking is a function of his infinite, passionate interest in his eternal salvation (*salighed*, 'happiness' or 'blessedness'). And this makes the normativity of self-concern comprehensive to a very high degree: concern for one's ultimate salvation should properly invest every moment of existence with an infinite importance. Every moment, every action, every idle word matters. The ever-present possibility of death, which brings with it the prospect of final judgement over one's whole life, means that concern needs to be built into every moment of subjective existence:

But if the task is to become subjective, then for the individual subject to think death is not at all some such thing in general but is an act, because the development of subjectivity consists precisely in this, that he, acting, works through himself in his thinking about his own existence, consequently that he actually thinks what is thought by actualizing it, consequently that he does not think for a moment: Now, you must keep watch every moment—but that he keeps watch every moment. (CUP, 1:169/SKS 7, 156–7)

Likewise, every moment in my past and future should be encountered with *samtidighed*, with a phenomenal sense that this remembered or anticipated event is happening *for me because I am answerable for it*. Like empathic access, contemporaneity of this sort involves an affective identification with my past person-stages. Unlike empathic access, however, it does not require retaining enough psychological continuity with the past to find my past desires and motivations compelling: like the Mortified Matron, I may be contemporary with a past person-stage whose dispositions and values I wholly repudiate, while still experiencing myself (my *self*) as identical with and answerable for that past person-stage.

Goldie's description of the way something analogous to 'free indirect style' operates in autobiographical memory gives, at first blush, a good description of what this contemporaneous way of remembering past selves with whom we lack empathic access looks like:

One does indeed see oneself as another, and in that sense it is from an external perspective and 'spectatorial', but nevertheless you think of your past self as unequivocally *you*, and of your past actions as unequivocally *yours*. In contrition and commitment to change, you come to see your earlier self, who you were then, and what you did then, in a new light. The possibility of self-forgiveness and redemption, then, arises just because you can see your earlier self from the perspective of a renewed, changed, self, who is able to rejoin the moral community.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Compare Baker 2000, p.79, on Oedipus' horrified realization that *he himself* killed Laius.

<sup>56</sup> Goldie 2012, p.110.

Yet as we've seen, Goldie also takes it that even in alienation we never lose a sense that we *are* the self we remember or anticipate, and that statements to the contrary are mere 'hyperbole'. He allows for the essential ambiguity involved in 'in one way of thinking of oneself as another, in another way thinking of that other absolutely as riveted to oneself',<sup>57</sup> yet insofar as he takes the first to be merely hyperbolic, he, like Rudd, downplays the depth of alienation and thereby doesn't seem to register that taking affective ownership of person-stages from which we have become alienated should be regarded as a psychological *achievement*, and one that ethics may demand we try to accomplish.

So contemporaneity turns out to be a stronger phenomenal 'glue' with a wider coverage than empathic access. It is able to unify my present sense of self with my memory-access to past person-stages regardless of massive changes in psychology, and does so with a normativity that, unlike the psychological normativity Schechtman appeals to, is non-defeasible. In short, it seems to do a lot of the work Lockean concernment is taken to do in unifying the subject across time, by giving me a non-defeasible motivation for identifying with all of my past and future. However, as I hope to show in the following chapter, we should not be too quick here to assume that Kierkegaard thinks contemporaneity thereby constitutes the self across time as a four-dimensional, psychological object. Kierkegaard's phenomenology of self-experience may, as I hope to have shown, be a useful resource for neo-Lockean metaphysics. But Kierkegaard himself is playing a different, and altogether more interesting, game.

<sup>57</sup> Goldie 2012, p.123.

## 6

# Continuity and Temporality

### The Neo-Lockean Project

In Chapter 5 I suggested that contemporaneity, as a sort of phenomenal ‘glue’ that binds the subject to her past and future person-stages, may be a useful resource for neo-Lockean discussions of personal identity. Neo-Lockean or Psychological Continuity View theorists hold that our survival across time is a matter of the persistence of psychological properties: we endure (or in some versions, perdure)<sup>1</sup> as the same person across time just insofar as some quantum of psychological properties continues from one moment to the next. Or to put it more precisely: if some person (-stage)-constituting set of psychological properties is appropriately related to some earlier or later set of person(-stage)-constituting psychological properties, these sets are co-personal and the person can be said to exist at all points in between them. The terms ‘person-constituting’ or ‘person-stage-constituting’ and ‘appropriately related’ are clearly magnets for philosophical controversy here and have been defined, tacitly or explicitly, by different theorists in a number of different ways.

For a start we need to determine what sorts of psychological properties might count as person-constituting, such that their persistence across time could count as constituting personal survival. Memory is the obvious such candidate property, but it is not the only one. As Sydney Shoemaker points out, even if we lost all our memories of all kinds (semantic, procedural, episodic, etc.) there may still be continuities of character and disposition such that a neo-Lockean may judge a person to have survived such a global ‘brain zap’.<sup>2</sup> So instead of memory, we might take it that the persistence of dispositions or propositional attitudes such as beliefs might constitute personal survival. Or we might hold that some *combination* of memories, dispositions, and other traits might be what continues us across time; we could, for instance, think in terms of Grice’s overlapping ‘total temporary states’ with which—a quarter-century before the contemporary explosion in personal identity theory began in the late 1960s—he attempts to revivify the Memory Criterion.<sup>3</sup> We might tell stories about synchronic and diachronic causal relationships between the properties of

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Lewis 1983, pp.55–77.

<sup>2</sup> Shoemaker and Swinburne 1984, pp.87–8.

<sup>3</sup> Roughly, a total temporary state is co-personal with a previous total temporary state if it contains at least one element which is an element of the immediately preceding state (Grice 1975).



mental states, stories which very quickly become quite sophisticated.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively we might appeal to a sort of phenomenal continuity, as Barry Dainton has recently done: moments of consciousness are co-personal just to the extent that each moment overlaps (in a manner akin to the Husserlian retention-intention-protention structure) with the moments of consciousness immediately adjacent to it.<sup>5</sup> We also need to specify just how these relevant psychological properties relate to each other in order to be person-constituting. Parfit famously distinguishes between psychological connectedness and psychological continuity, the latter consisting of ‘overlapping chains of *strong* connectedness’, and argues that while strong connectedness is not transitive in the way numerical identity needs to be, psychological continuity is transitive.<sup>6</sup> So there is considerable scope for variation within the neo-Lockean picture both as to which psychological properties are synchronically person-constituting and what sort of relations need to hold between them to constitute a self diachronically.

Neo-Lockeanism has come in for heavy criticism in the last two decades, notably from animalists such as Eric Olson<sup>7</sup> and eliminativists<sup>8</sup> such as Thomas Metzinger.<sup>9</sup> Eliminativists argue there is no self at all, while animalists argue that selves or persons *just are* individual human animals. Animalism has a certain attractive parsimony to it: Locke accepted both ‘Man’ identity (roughly, the identity of the human animal) and ‘Self’ identity into his ontology, but animalism dispenses with the need for the latter. So the very fact that neo-Lockeans have continued to defend their position speaks to the plausibility of Locke’s central insight: psychology *does* have a bearing on personal identity. That is why animalists have had to spend such a large portion of their time trying to accommodate or dissolve the Lockean ‘transplant intuition’,<sup>10</sup> according to which a brain transplant would result in a transfer of identity from brain-donor to brain-recipient. The same would hold for a ‘brain wipe’ followed by a transfer of information from one brain to another.

Our sense that psychology somehow does matter to identity, that a patient with advanced Alzheimer’s for instance is no longer the same *person* even if they are the same animal, is hard to shake. As the previous chapters have made clear, I think neo-Lockeans are right that psychology matters: the fact that we are beings with first-personal perspective is crucial for understanding personal identity, as figures as diverse as Lynn Rudder Baker<sup>11</sup> and Bas van Fraassen<sup>12</sup> have argued. What neo-Lockeans have done is to use this insight to motivate the construction of an ontology of the person out of psychological materials. Selves or persons turn out, according to these theorists, to be psychologically-constituted objects—a rather odd sort of object, admittedly, but an object nonetheless, just another one of those medium-sized dry goods that J. L. Austin wryly observed metaphysicians are most comfortable dealing

<sup>4</sup> For a recent example, see Shoemaker 2011. <sup>5</sup> Dainton 2008. <sup>6</sup> Parfit 1984, pp.206–7.

<sup>7</sup> Olson 1997, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> On eliminativism vs reductionism, see e.g. Giles 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Metzinger 2003, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> On which see e.g. Olson 1997, pp.42–52.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Baker, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> van Fraassen 2005.

with.<sup>13</sup> Such objects would have specifiable identity and persistence conditions, such that it would at least theoretically be possible to re-identify the same self at different points in time. We can say that Octavian in 31 BCE *is* Augustus in 27 BCE if we can point to appropriate forms of psychological continuity or connection holding between the victor of Actium and the newly anointed *princeps*. Doing so would allow us to point to a single diachronically extended object present at a birth and a death and at all moments in between, sometimes bearing the name Gaius Octavius, sometimes Augustus, at one point a newborn baby, at another an ambitious teen donning the *toga virilis* for the first time, at another a canny politician feigning reluctance to accept the power being offered him, at yet another an old man dying at Nola. The baby and the old man neither share physical matter nor have access to each other's psychological states, but this need not, if neo-Lockeanism succeeds, mean they are not the same person.

That sort of metaphysical project sounds a world away from Kierkegaard. Yet there are indeed places where Kierkegaard outlines what looks inescapably like an ontology of the self—one that both sees the self as psychologically constituted, and that seems to assign a central role to psychological continuity in personal identity. If I am right about the richness and depth of Kierkegaard's descriptions of self-experience, that should make his work a mouth-wateringly tempting resource for neo-Lockeans. And yet, as we'll see, the sort of metaphysics Kierkegaard is doing is in fact very different. Far from participating in these metaphysical debates, Kierkegaard, as I'll go on to claim, may just be showing us the way out of this particular fly bottle.

## Anti-Climacus' Ontology of Selfhood

*The Sickness Unto Death* opens with what appears to be, and has widely been taken to be, a relational ontology of selfhood. It is certainly an unusual ontology, in that its object never *is* but is always *coming to be* ('every moment that a self exists, it is becoming (*i Vorden*), for the self *κατα δυναμιν* does not actually exist, is simply that which ought to come into existence' (SUD, 30/SKS 11, 146, translation modified)), yet the task the pseudonym Anti-Climacus sets himself is clearly ontological in character. In the infamous opening paragraph, he seeks to distinguish between several components that make up the human being (*menneske*) and specify the conditions under which those components constitute a self (*selv*):

A human being is spirit [*Mennesket er Aand*]. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates to itself or is the relation's relating to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and eternal, of freedom and necessity, in

<sup>13</sup> Austin 1964, p.8.

short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self. (SUD, 13/SKS 11, 129, trans. modified)<sup>14</sup>

Note the rather tangled logic at work in this passage: the terms human, spirit, self, and self-relation are all stated to be equivalent, but then 'human' is qualified as a 'synthesis' and 'synthesis' is then defined as *not* being a self until it relates to itself (*forholder sig til sig selv*). Merold Westphal notes that while Anti-Climacus' psychological account of the self has Aristotelian, Cartesian, and Hegelian elements,<sup>15</sup> it also pulls against all three of these tendencies in equally important ways. In this opening passage, Anti-Climacus has, as John Davenport points out, already made a rather significant break with both the Cartesian substance dualist (for whom what I *am* is a thinking immaterial substance connected to, but not identical with, a material body) and Aristotelian hylomorphic views of the self (according to which I am an indissoluble synthesis of matter and form). The *human being* might be viewed as either a mind-body synthesis or an Aristotelian substantial form, but that is not what 'self' or 'spirit' is for Anti-Climacus. Rather, self/spirit is something the mind-body synthesis must *achieve*: 'Every human being is a psychical-physical synthesis intended to be spirit' (SUD, 43/SKS 11, 158).

Anti-Climacus' tripartite separation of body, soul, and spirit echoes Luther's assertion that 'The nature of man consists of the three parts—spirit, soul, and body' with spirit the highest and that by which 'he is enabled to lay hold on things incomprehensible, invisible, and eternal'.<sup>16</sup> But what makes his account new is the note of self-relation he introduces into this structure, arguably influenced by figures such as Fichte. Anti-Climacus pushes self-identity up one level: the self or spirit is not the mind-body synthesis *itself* but is rather a (conceptually) second-order entity, one that supervenes upon the human being if and only if the human being relates to itself in a particular reflexive way.<sup>17</sup> Selfhood is neither the synthesis of physical and mental factors itself (as in Aristotle), nor merely the 'negative unity' of the oppositions (both physical and psychological) that make up the human being, but a 'positive third' that unites them in its self-relation (SUD, 13/SKS 11, 129).<sup>18</sup>

So, how might we situate this ontology of selfhood with respect to contemporary metaphysical approaches to personal identity? Is Anti-Climacus more closely aligned

<sup>14</sup> As Michelle Kosch (2006, p.202) notes, the Hongs' 'relates itself to itself' is a somewhat misleading translation of *forholder sig til sig selv*, as *forholder sig* is here a reflexive verb.

<sup>15</sup> Westphal 1987.

<sup>16</sup> Luther 1956, p.303.

<sup>17</sup> Davenport 2013, pp.234–5.

<sup>18</sup> I here follow John Elrod's (1975, p.30) interpretation that 'negative unity' here refers to the fact that the elements held in tension stand in opposition to each other and cannot be understood apart from one another. This interpretation therefore says nothing about the way the self relates to the opposition. Other interpretations have been given, such as Hubert Dreyfus' (2008, p.14) claim that 'negative unity' refers to 'denying one set of factors and acting as if only the other aspect of the self is the essential one'. This is an interesting reading, but it is not clear to me that it fits the text: for Anti-Climacus this would be a form of despair i.e. a misrelation of spirit, whereas 'negative unity' appears to describe an element in the sub-spiritual structure on which selfhood supervenes.

to the neo-Lockean psychological continuity view, or physicalist views such as animalism?

First, we need to be clear here that Anti-Climacus is no sort of ego-substantialist. His picture contains no ‘metaphysical pincushion’<sup>19</sup> (to borrow a phrase from Rudd) in which each accidental property of the self inheres. Anti-Climacus replaces the substantial *res cogitans* of the Cartesians with a relational process: in Arne Grøn’s gloss, ‘Self is not a substance, but a relation, or, to be more precise, self is a process: self-relating.’<sup>20</sup> What makes us what we are is to be found *within* the psychology of the human being, a fact about how it relates to itself, not something superadded to the facts of psychology.<sup>21</sup> Not all commentators have grasped this point. Jamie Turnbull, for instance, insists that ‘the soul clearly is an entity for Kierkegaard (even if it inhabits the theological, as opposed to the physical, universe)’ and that ‘As such Kierkegaard’s soul is closer to the Cartesian substance, or immaterial soul, than Rudd and Stokes are willing, or able, to allow’.<sup>22</sup> Rudd and I have offered a fuller reply to Turnbull elsewhere,<sup>23</sup> but here it is worth pointing out that Anti-Climacus, and Kierkegaard more generally, does not use *sjel* to mean ‘soul’ in the sense of a substance that bears personal identity across time and faces eternal judgement afterwards—that is what spirit (*aand*) is for Kierkegaard, while *sjel* is rather the *psyche* aspect of the psycho-physical synthesis upon which self or spirit supervenes. Hence the Hong’s translation ‘psychical’ for *sjel* is apt, if necessarily un-poetic. So for all the anti-modern aspects of Kierkegaard’s project and of Anti-Climacus’ view of the self, his view of the self is definitely post-Lockean. If we have immaterial souls, they are not what make us what we are.

Reading Anti-Climacus as some species of physicalist also looks to be a non-starter. Claims that selves are bodies, or brains, or animals (as defined by organic functioning), all seem to be ruled out by the reflexive character of Anti-Climacus’ understanding of the self. Self-reflexivity is presumably a psychological property, unless we were to count the sub-phenomenal work our bodies do in monitoring and regulating temperature, digestion, hormone production, and so on as ‘self-reflexivity’—which is clearly not what Kierkegaard has in mind. One might be tempted to reply that relating to itself is nonetheless something that (minded) bodies, brains, or animals do, and so Anti-Climacus might not be completely at odds with physicalist views. However, precisely what makes physicalism attractive is that it does not need to rely upon psychological states in order to explain the persistence of identity, thus allowing us to say that I *am* the baby in this photo even though there is vanishingly little, perhaps nothing, that connects me psychologically to that baby. It also allows me to make sense of statements like ‘Peter is in a permanent vegetative

<sup>19</sup> Rudd 2005, p.419.      <sup>20</sup> Grøn 2004, p.131.

<sup>21</sup> Though arguably something is added in that the self-relationship depends on a relationship to God that can only be discerned through a gift of grace.

<sup>22</sup> Turnbull 2011, p.296.      <sup>23</sup> Rudd and Stokes 2013.

state'. If Peter's identity-conditions are psychological then 'Peter' in this proposition must fail to refer, as a PVS patient no longer has psychological properties. But if Peter is a body or an animal, then he still exists and so can bear predicates like 'in a vegetative state'. By making selfhood conditional on self-reflexivity, however, Anti-Climacus is clearly tying the achievement and maintenance of selfhood to a psychological property.

Even so, the fact that Kierkegaard views the human being as a synthesis might also initially seem to rule him out as any sort of neo-Lockean, because while neo-Lockeans reject the immaterial substance account offered by dualists, they nonetheless identify what the self or person is with its psychology, and thus seem to identify it with the mind rather than body side of the physical-psychical dichotomy that Anti-Climacus posits. Locke himself has been criticized for downplaying embodiment; after all his thought-experiment of a prince and a cobbler swapping minds in the middle of the night<sup>24</sup> (which acts as an intuition pump for the Transplant Intuition) makes the physical continuity provided by embodiment contingent to identity in a way that psychological continuity is not. Claudia Welz, for instance, claims that Locke's focus on psychology as the bearer of identity downplays embodiment and sociality; he thereby misses that 'Qualitative identity involves an inner sense of identity that is experienced from a first person perspective *and* the oneness of the bodily self that can also be seen from an observer's third person perspective'.<sup>25</sup> However, this needn't be a huge stumbling block. For one thing, note that Locke's prince and cobbler do in fact remain embodied, just in different bodies. At one point Locke avers that were my finger to be cut off I would no longer be concerned for it as part of me,<sup>26</sup> which Welz thinks 'indicates that Locke considers the unity of the body as irrelevant for the unity of consciousness', leaving him unable to account for phenomena such as phantom pain and psychosomatic illnesses which 'teach that body and mind cannot be separated from each other and that a person does not consist of random combinations of material and spiritual substances, as Locke seems to assume'.<sup>27</sup> Yet this passage, as I read it, illustrates just how intimately related Locke *does* take bodily experience to be to the concern central to identity. I am *concerned* for my body precisely to the extent that I experience pain and pleasure through it, both somatosensorially and instrumentally. Hence the reason that I stop caring what happens to my little finger once it's cut off—even though I might care very much about my loss of bodily *unity*—is precisely that the severed finger ceases to contribute to my embodied self-experience. Conversely, the pains of a phantom limb might concern me very much, and concern me in much the *same* way that a pain in a non-phantom limb would concern me (at least up to the point where I try to work out how to alleviate the pain). So the fact Anti-Climacus sees selfhood as supervening

<sup>24</sup> Locke 1975, p.340.

<sup>26</sup> Locke 1975, p.341.

<sup>25</sup> Welz 2010, p.273.

<sup>27</sup> Welz 2010, p.273.

upon a synthesis of body and soul might not make him as incompatible with neo-Lockean psychological continuity theories of identity as we might have thought.

Moreover, while psychological properties (*sjel* as mind or *psyche*) is only part of the synthesis upon which selfhood supervenes, the *form* of that synthesis is *itself* psychological:

In the relation between two, the relation is the third as a negative unity, and the two relate to the relation and in the relation to the relation; thus *under the qualification of the psychical* [*under Bestemmelsen Sjel*] the relation between the psychical and the physical is a relation. If, however, this relation relates to itself, this relation is the positive third, and this is the self. (SUD, 13/SKS 11, 129, translation modified, my emphasis)

Note that there are in fact two psychological relations going on in this passage. Firstly, there is the way the mind relates to the body by distinguishing itself therefrom, which is a psychological relation ('under the qualification of the psychical'). But then when the mind-body complex relates to itself—which is what constitutes the 'positive third' of selfhood—this too is a psychological operation, albeit one of a higher order. And like Locke himself, Anti-Climacus sees not just the possession of psychological properties but of *consciousness* as essential to self-constitution:

Generally speaking, consciousness—that is, self-consciousness—is decisive with regard to the self. The more consciousness, the more self [*Jo mere Bevisthed jo mere Selv*]; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self. A person who has no will at all is not a self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he has also. (SUD, 29/SKS 11, 145)

It could be objected here that Anti-Climacus' reference to 'more self' is antithetical to the traditional understanding of identity as a strict, all-or-nothing logical relation: the phrase 'more identical' seems about as absurd as 'slightly pregnant'. Already, here, we can begin to discern respects in which Anti-Climacus offers something different from the self of the neo-Lockean tradition. But it does seem clear that *Sickness Unto Death* develops an ontology that in many respects is recognizable as belonging to that tradition, thematically if not genealogically, in that it takes self as arising from (embodied) consciousness itself rather than from the inherence of accidents in a substance, or the persistence of biological or physical facts about human beings. So if *The Sickness Unto Death* contains a genuine ontological claim about selfhood, it is one that is more closely aligned to the neo-Lockean, psychological side of the personal identity debate rather than the physicalist or animalist side. Human beings are both physical and mental entities, but *selves* are the outcome of a distinctively psychological form of self-relation on the human being's part.

## Continuity

Traditionally, the question of the identity and persistence conditions of selves has been implicitly or explicitly understood as a question of re-identification across

time: what criterion/criteria would need to be satisfied to licence us in saying that the person encountered at  $t_2$  is the same person as the person encountered at  $t_1$ ?<sup>28</sup> There are good reasons for doubting whether the re-identification question is really the appropriate question for getting at what matters in selfhood; Schechtman has argued that characterization rather than re-identification is the question that gets us closer to what we actually care about when asking about personal identity (e.g. survival, self-interested concern, moral responsibility, compensation),<sup>29</sup> while Arne Grøn claims that we don't re-identify *ourselves* in the criterial way (he thinks) we re-identify other objects.<sup>30</sup> Still, if we bracket these quite legitimate concerns for the moment, the re-identification approach does at least help to bring into focus the question of what forms of *continuity* between the  $t_1$ -person and the  $t_2$ -person would constitute continuity of self, that is, what has to persist in order for selves to survive. If Anti-Climacus' approach has something in common with neo-Lockeanism, does his view amount to a *psychological continuity* approach? That is, does the Anti-Climacus self amount to a psychological object, extended in time, and at least theoretically re-identifiable at different moments?

Relatively late in *The Sickness Unto Death* we do, in fact, find a discussion of continuity (*Continueerlighed*) and consistency (*Conseqvents*) that on its face seems congruent with neo-Lockeanism. This discussion is also consonant in many ways with a concern for psychological continuity as a key condition for selfhood that runs throughout Kierkegaard's authorship. We can trace this concern right back to the beginning, with the emphasis on 'continuity' of self in *The Concept of Irony*: the ironist loses himself in a series of disconnected moods (CI, 284/SKS 1, 320), which, as K. Brian Söderquist puts it, 'remain internally unconnected and thus the inner continuity which binds a self together is lacking'.<sup>31</sup> The idea of a self being 'bound' together via the internal connectedness of psychological states—the standard neo-Lockean picture of personal identity—is a key factor in Kierkegaard's claim that psychologically atomized subjects such as the ironist are not, in fact, selves. As we saw in Chapter 1, such deliberate ironic atomization of psychological moments is also a key feature in the aesthete's flight from boredom in *Either/Or*, most clearly evident in the chapter 'The Rotation of Crops' which lauds the aesthete's capacity to become absorbed in such disconnected, trivial details as a bead of sweat running down an interlocutor's face (EO, 1:299/SKS 2, 288). For the fully developed aesthete, 'No part of life ought to have so much meaning for a person that he cannot forget it any moment he wants to' (EO, 1:293/SKS 2, 282) and accordingly, a stable continuity of memory, mood, and disposition is rendered impossible. Anti-Climacus diagnoses this condition in most people, the great mass of 'spiritless' individuals living lives of 'endearing childish naiveté' or 'shallow triviality' whose lives lack any deep connecting thread between events:

<sup>28</sup> See e.g. Strawson 1959, pp.31–8 *passim*; Schechtman 1996, pp.7–25 *passim*.

<sup>29</sup> Schechtman 1996, pp.136–62.

<sup>30</sup> Grøn 2004, pp.128–30.

<sup>31</sup> Söderquist 2007, p.160.

Their lives . . . are made up of some action of sorts, some incidents, of this and that: now they do something good, and then something stupid, and then they begin all over again; now they are in despair for an afternoon, perhaps for three weeks, but then they are jolly fellows again, and then once again in despair for a day. They play along in life, so to speak, but they never experience putting everything together in one thing, never achieve the idea of an infinite self-consistency. That is why they are always talking among themselves about the particular, particular good deeds, particular sins. (SUD, 107/SKS 11, 219)

Locke speaks of sameness of consciousness as conferring personal identity, and Anti-Climacus too speaks of extended consciousness as the condition for the consistency and continuity across time that constitutes selfhood:

But how rare is the person who has continuity with regard to his consciousness of himself! As a rule, men are conscious only momentarily, conscious in the midst of big decisions, but they do not take the daily everyday into account at all; they are spirit of sorts for an hour one day a week—which, of course, is a rather crude [*bestialsk*] way to be spirit. But eternity is the essential continuity and demands this of a person or that he be conscious as spirit and have faith. (SUD, 105/SKS 11, 217)

Self-consciousness, according to Anti-Climacus, issues in a qualitative ‘consistency’ which amounts to existing qua spirit (SUD, 107/SKS 11, 219). Yet this consistency is not a function of psychological continuity per se but of the self-relating activity that constitutes selfhood, an active appropriation rather than mere succession. Selves qualified as spirit have ‘an essential interior consistency and a consistency in something higher, at least in an idea’, and actively cultivate such consistency and guard against a dissolution whereby the human being would ‘be torn out of the totality in which he has his life’ and plunged into ‘a chaos in which there is no agreement within itself, no momentum, no *impetus*’ (SUD, 107/SKS 11, 219). The stakes are high: to lose consistency is to face an ‘infinite loss’ which is the loss of selfhood itself, the loss of an integrated, coherent, and spiritually qualified totality that ‘immediate individuals, the childlike or childish’ (SUD, 107–8/SKS 11, 219), caught up in a succession of disconnected particularities, never attain to begin with.

This active, appropriative function of self-consciousness marks an essential difference between continuity of spirit, with its ‘essential continuity of the eternal through being before God in faith’ (SUD, 105/SKS 11, 218) and the *merely* psychological continuity of sinfulness which gains its own ‘increasingly established continuity’ (SUD, 106/SKS 11, 218) as it persists over time. Just as moments of, say, anger can be said to be expressions of a continuous disposition of short-tempereness that exists outside of individual angry incidents, so ‘In the deepest sense, the state of sin is the sin; the particular sins are not the continuance of sin but the expression for the continuance of sin; in the specific new sin the impetus of sin merely becomes more perceptible to the eye [*sandselig mere til at bemærke*]’ (SUD, 106/SKS 11, 218). For the demonic personality, for whom there is a kind of self-conscious wilfulness in his sinning, it is *only* the continuity of sin that holds him together: ‘the state of sin is what



holds him together deep down where he has sunk, profanely strengthening him with its consistency' (SUD, 108/SKS 11, 220). These demonic subjects have, according to Vigilius Haufniensis in *The Concept of Anxiety*, 'an extraordinary continuity' compared to those stuck in the aesthetic sphere (CA, 129–30/SKS 4, 431). But as Davenport notes, the continuity of the demonic is not volitionally unified, and so is still subject to sudden reversal.<sup>32</sup>

For present purposes it is important to note that this analysis of the sinner strongly resembles a neo-Lockean picture of a self constituted by the persistence of psychological states. Anti-Climacus endorses one type of continuity (spirit, that is, active self-appropriation) as self-constituting and denies another (sinfulness) that status, but choosing between forms of continuity in this way seems to wed Anti-Climacus to the foundational neo-Lockean claim that at least *some* form of psychological continuity across time is what constitutes selfhood. Or so, at first blush, it appears.

Yet if Anti-Climacus does take some form of psychologically mediated continuity across time to be constitutive of selfhood, his account will run into the same serious problems that psychological identity theorists since Locke have never entirely managed to overcome. We now turn to a consideration of some of these problems.

## The Loss of Selfhood

Perhaps Anti-Climacus' most innovative contribution to the philosophical discussion of selves is his claim that selfhood is something to be achieved rather than always already given, and moreover, something that can be *lost*. As we've seen, Anti-Climacus claims that a distinctive, active form of appropriative self-consciousness (one that relates to itself as it relates to the power which established it) creates a continuity or consistency that unifies the disparate moments of the human being's psychological experience into a coherent whole. Yet taken together, two claims made in *The Sickness Unto Death*—that self-consciousness confers selfhood, and that most people are only intermittently self-conscious—suggests that selfhood may be fragile and easily lost. Anti-Climacus acknowledges this as a very real danger:

It may not be detected that in a deeper sense he lacks a self. Such things do not create much of a stir in the world, for a self is the last thing the world cares about and the most dangerous thing of all for a person to show signs of having. The greatest hazard of all, losing the self, can occur very quietly in the world, as if it were nothing at all. No other loss can occur so quietly; any other loss—an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife etc.—is sure to be noticed. (SUD, 32–3/SKS 11, 148)

There is an important ambiguity in the way Anti-Climacus speaks of loss of self, because in another sense the subject *cannot* get rid of itself: it cannot rid itself of what it finds itself to be, which leads to the state of ontological misrelation to itself that

<sup>32</sup> Davenport 2011, p.165.

Anti-Climacus calls despair (*fortvivelse*), the state of either not wanting to be oneself or wanting to be oneself in way that denies what one really is:

For despair is not attributable to the misrelation but to the relation that relates to itself. A person cannot rid himself of the relation to himself any more than he can rid himself of his self, which, after all, is one and the same thing, since the self is the relation to oneself. (SUD, 17/SKS 11, 133, translation modified)

Note the imputation that once selfhood *has* been achieved it can never *completely* slip back into spiritlessness: ‘for that the self is too much self’ (SUD, 62/SKS 11, 177). Yet Anti-Climacus discusses loss of self often enough to suggest that he takes the possibility of selfhood being forfeited seriously, and the equation of self-consciousness (which he admits is usually sporadic) with selfhood would seem to commit him to the claim that selves can indeed be, and perhaps frequently are, lost.

Anti-Climacus appears to believe that some sort of psychological condition (namely non-despairing self-relatedness) has to be sustained across time if selfhood is not to be lost. The problem, as generations of psychological-criterion identity theorists have found to their cost, is that it seems almost impossible to specify *any* significant form of psychological continuity that holds across a long enough period of time to ground our intuitions about the unitary identity of individual persons. Consciousness itself, of course, is not continual, which generates difficult questions about how identity can be maintained over periods of unconsciousness—the ‘Bridge Problem’.<sup>33</sup> We assume that the person who woke up this morning is the same person who went to sleep last night. Yet any theory that sees personal identity as conferred by continuity of *consciousness* would seem to furnish no more grounds for saying this than for saying that every night we die, and every morning a new person is born in the bed ‘vacated’ by the previous day’s person. To the extent that Anti-Climacus implicitly identifies self-consciousness as the form of psychological continuity that is constitutive of selfhood, he will have to account for how the self can survive even the most mundane stretches of unconsciousness that punctuate our lives.

The Bridge Problem needn’t be a decisive objection to Anti-Climacus, any more than it’s decisive against anyone else. Yet precisely because Anti-Climacus offers such a distinctive candidate for the psychological property which must persist in order for selves to be constituted—an appropriative form of *self-consciousness*—the problems his account faces are correspondingly more severe than those of the more orthodox neo-Lockean positions. Anti-Climacus’s self-relation is a remarkably rigorous process of appropriation: the self *wills to be itself* in the fullest sense, taking responsibility for its entire history, concretion, and situation. Each ‘life-moment’, as we might call it—each set of psychological, physical, and social facts pertaining to the human being in

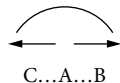
<sup>33</sup> See Parfit 1984, p.292; Dainton 2008, p.27 *passim*; Gustafsson 2011; Stokes 2014.

question at a given moment—is appropriated by the individual human being as what that human being *is*. Yet if such self-relation can *cease*, and then subsequently restart, then so too, it seems, do selves. We thus find ourselves with a metaphysical conundrum: how can something cease to exist and then come back into existence? What could justify saying that the *same* self comes back into existence rather than there being a succession of different selves, supervening at different points in time on the same human being?

A Parfitian suspicion arises here that such re-identification questions can only have trivial or arbitrary answers. If my friends and I decide to re-constitute a club that hasn't existed in over a century, and then claim that our club *is* the original club, the identity question—is this the same club or a new one?—doesn't seem to admit of a meaningful answer.<sup>34</sup> We could, following Nozick, hold that the self that arises in a moment of Anti-Climacus self-consciousness is the same self as the one that existed in a previously concluded moment of self-consciousness insofar as it is the 'closest continuer' of that previous self.<sup>35</sup> But this certainly appeals to no deep further fact (to use a Parfitian term) about selfhood. In effect, the individual human being's self would have the same sort of identity as the monarch of England: a succession of different individuals all fulfilling the same role. Anti-Climacus often mentions the self as being (or having something) eternal, but under this scenario the self would only be 'eternal' in the sense that the English monarch never dies, even though the individuals fulfilling the role do.

We've seen that a closely related problem that besets neo-Lockean theory (since Reid first raised it against Locke) concerns transitivity. This problem turns out to be even more serious for Anti-Climacus in that he takes it that the self only exists in relating to itself, including its past and future. This does not, I think, mean relating to our past *or* our future at any given moment, but relating to each as part of a unified whole. Interestingly, in a journal entry from 1839, Kierkegaard gives us a striking diagrammatic representation of what this is like:

Premonition [*Ahnelse*] does not lie in the direction, the path of the eye being pointed in the direction of existence and its future, but in the reflection of the eye's direction [toward] the past, so that by staring at what lies behind (in another sense, what lies in front) the eye develops a disposition to see what lies in front (in another sense, what lies behind).



If A is thus the present time, the time in which we are living, and B its future, then I do not see B by standing at A and turning my face toward B; for if I turn that way I don't see anything at all, but if C is the past, then it is by turning towards C that I see B, as also the premonitory eyes

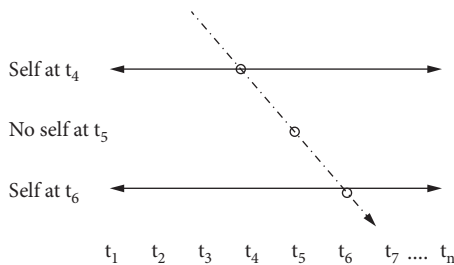
<sup>34</sup> Parfit 1984, p.213.

<sup>35</sup> Nozick 1983, pp.29–69.

possessed by the Mandrake in Achim V. Arnim's novella were set *in the back of his head*, while the two other eyes, which did nothing more than look ahead in the ordinary way, i.e., simple, straightforward eyes, were set in his brow as with other people, or in that part of the head that is turned toward *the future*. (KJN 2, 55–6/SKS 18, 60; EE 178)

In relating to the future I cannot but help relating to the past that conditions it and determines what the future will mean for me; I can only understand (and predict) what is to come on the basis of what has come before. Without wanting to read too much into this early journal entry, I think it gives us an idea of the way in which, for Kierkegaard, self-relation simultaneously reaches backwards and forward across our lives—but it does so *from a given point* (A, in Kierkegaard's diagram). And this temporal situatedness throws a spanner in the works for any attempt to construct a straightforward metaphysical account of identity using Kierkegaard's writings as a base.

To help us see why, consider the following diagram. Each 'o' represents a conscious human being, with the spatio-temporal connections that hold between it at different times indicated by the broken line. The arrowed lines represent the range of past and future life-moments that each human being relates to itself in a self-constituting way. At  $t_4$  the human relates itself to its entire history ( $t_1$ – $t_n$ ), thereby making it a self; hence all life-moments from  $t_1$  to  $t_n$  are part of the self. At  $t_5$  the human ceases to relate to itself in this way (thus ceasing to be a self), and resumes relating to itself again at  $t_6$ :



Note the effect this has on each life-moment: if we're asked 'Is  $t_3$  a moment in the life of a self?' we cannot give a tenseless yes or no answer. The most we can say is that ' $t_3$  is a moment in the life of a self at  $t_4$ , not a moment in the life of a self at  $t_5$  and a moment in the life of a self at  $t_6$ '. Yet because identity is classically regarded as a transitive logical relationship ( $x = y$  and  $y = z$  entails  $x = z$ ), identity questions always ask for tenseless answers, and when these can't be given, the criteria upon which identity is claimed to obtain are called into question, as in the case of Reid's boy-soldier-general example.

There only appear to be two things we can say about the situation depicted in the diagram: either the self successively comes into, goes out of, and comes back into existence—in which case we have strong metaphysical grounds to doubt whether there's any force in the declaration that the self at  $t_6$  is the same self as the self at

$t_4$ —or we admit that two (or more) selves exist in the course of a single human life, both of which appropriate exactly the same life-moments. This would apparently involve multiple selves supervening upon the same life moments, such that we will find it hard to say *how many* selves exist at any given point  $t_1, t_2 \dots t_n$ .

One response to this problem might be a quasi-reductionist one: to read 'self' as simply another name for, rather than a product of, self-consciousness, and so see Anti-Climacus selfhood as the name for a state which individual human beings are in some of the time but not always. Romano Guardini reads Kierkegaardian selfhood as intermittent and punctual in this way, 'something that only is as an act and in an act; something that flashes through in certain, namely, personal acts'.<sup>36</sup> The effect of this move would be to divorce meaningful questions about personal identity from questions of selfhood: it's not selves (which would be temporary psychological states) who bear moral responsibility or who are the objects of our self-interested concern, but human beings. Yet this is clearly a long way from what Anti-Climacus wants to claim for the self: for him, it's *selves* that are bound up with 'fatal' concern, selves that are called to answer morally *and eschatologically*. In short, Anti-Climacus wants there to be a 'deep further fact' about selfhood underlying the disparate moments of psychological experience, wants this deep further fact to be psychological in character, and wants it to inhere in a state of consciousness that, by his own admission, is not always achieved and can be intermittent in character. How, then, do we get out of the apparent logical contradictions and incoherencies his account throws up? The answer is to be found in the distinctive temporal character Anti-Climacus assigns to self-experience, something that marks a crucial point of differentiation from the neo-Lockean tradition—and suggests that Kierkegaard is in fact doing something very different to mainstream metaphysicians of the self.

## The Present-tense Character of the Self

An interesting feature of the contexts in which Anti-Climacus discusses loss-of-self is that he appears to conflate *loss* of self with never *having had* a self, or the loss of an already achieved state with never achieving that state in the first place. The major discussion of loss of self concerns the 'person of immediacy' who has 'emasculated oneself in a spiritual sense' through thoughtless immersion in a finite world that 'has no understanding of the reductionism and narrowness involved in having lost oneself, not by being volatilized in the infinite, but by being completely finitized, by becoming a number instead of a self, just one more man, just one more repetition of this everlasting *Einerlei*' (SUD, 33/SKS 11, 149). Caught up in the stream of finite things against which it never differentiates itself, the finitized subject offers no resistance and takes no risks:

<sup>36</sup> Guardini 1935, p.25; the translation is given in Šajda 2012, p.311.

Not to venture is prudent. And yet, precisely by not venturing it is so terribly easy to lose what would be hard to lose, however much one lost by risking, and in any case never this way, so easily, so completely, as if it were nothing at all—namely, oneself. If I have ventured wrongly, well, then life helps me by punishing me. But if I have not ventured at all, who helps me then? Moreover, what if not by venturing at all in the highest sense (and to venture in the highest sense is precisely to become aware of oneself) I cowardly gain all earthly advantages—and lose myself! (SUD, 34–5/SKS 11, 150)

The person of immediacy is ground ‘as smooth as a rolling stone’ (SUD, 34/SKS 11, 150), allowing her to pass through the social and economic world easily and without friction. In what sense does this count as *losing* a self? Interestingly, this is not so much to lose a state that has already been attained, as to lose the *possibility* of becoming a self, like a raw material that is simply ground down rather than ground into the shape that it was intended for (SUD, 33/SKS 11, 149). Compare Anti-Climacus’ claims here with Kierkegaard’s image of the ‘inner being’ being ‘stillborn’ in the veronymous discourse ‘Strengthening the Inner Being’: if the concern (*bekymring*) for transcendent meaning whereby the subject comes to differentiate itself from the rest of the world leads that person to ‘have in mind deciding this matter once and for all and then being finished with it’, then ‘the inner being would only be stillborn and would vanish again’ (EUD, 87/SKS 5, 94). Here too the ontological status of the inner being is ambiguous: it vanishes ‘again’, yet it is also ‘stillborn’, suggesting that it is both simultaneously something that has been lost and something that never came into being in the first place. In the same way, according to Anti-Climacus, ‘secular’ or ‘philistine-bourgeois’ persons of immediacy, who never tear themselves out of finitude’s worldly, prudential calculations of probability in order to relate themselves to something infinite and transcendent, ‘*have* no self, no self for whose sake they could venture everything, no self before God’ (SUD, 35/SKS 11, 151, my emphasis) and yet such a self ‘*has* lost his self and God’ (SUD, 41/SKS 11, 156, my emphasis). In the first instance it appears clear that the self has never existed (the self of immediacy hasn’t degenerated *into* philistine thoughtlessness, but has always existed within it), and yet the self has at the same time been *lost*.

This curious conflation of the self’s having been lost with its never having existed at all also features elsewhere in Anti-Climacus’ descriptions of despair. When the ‘philistine-bourgeois’ finds himself confronted by adversity, he despairs: but this reveals that he *was* in despair already, in that he lacked ‘faith’s possibility of being able under God to save a self from certain downfall’ (SUD, 41/SKS 11, 156). To despair is to be revealed as having been *always* in despair: ‘for whenever that which triggers his despair occurs, it is immediately apparent that he has been in despair his whole life . . . Despair is a qualification of the spirit, is related to the eternal, and thus has something of the eternal in its dialectic’ (SUD, 24/SKS 11, 140). This ‘eternal’ element here amounts to despair being *always* present at all points in the life of the human being up to the despair-event that discloses it.

The other side of this eternal element in the dialectic is that to be saved from despair is somehow to be *permanently* saved. Anti-Climacus tells us that not being in despair is different to not being lame, for the non-lame person can still become lame in the future, whereas to be saved from despair is to lose the very possibility of despairing itself: 'Not to be in despair must signify the destroyed possibility of being able to be in despair; if a person is truly not to be in despair, he must at every moment destroy the possibility' (SUD, 15/SKS 11, 131). If the self is cured of despair, then it thereby continually destroys the possibility of ever despairing again, and, as a corollary, if the self *does* despair again this shows that it was *always* in despair all along and was *never* in fact saved.<sup>37</sup> As despair is equivalent to loss of self, and to be saved from despair is to acquire a self, this amounts to the claim that to lose the self is never to have *had* a self in the first place, and to gain a self is to gain it once and for all.

Such a conclusion is surely puzzling and decidedly un-Kierkegaardian. If salvation from despair depends upon a particular state of consciousness, one that can be punctual and intermittent and that must be actively maintained, how could it be the case that we lose the possibility of sinking back into despair? If selfhood is achieved through such a precarious and fragile mental state, how could it be the case that selfhood is never lost—and if it *is* never lost, why use the strong, distinctive phrase 'loss of self' at all? Why not simply talk about selfhood never being achieved, or about the *capacity* for selfhood being squandered,<sup>38</sup> rather than saying repeatedly that the *self* can be lost?

This apparently un-Kierkegaardian once-and-for-all character of salvation seems to be contradicted in the discourse 'To Preserve One's Soul in Patience', where instead it appears that the *opposite* of salvation is once-and-for-all. Here, Kierkegaard tells us that if one loses his soul, 'it would be lost for all time and for eternity; if he lost it for a single moment, it would be lost permanently, and death would be unable to help him, but precisely for death's sake he is bound to wish to have preserved it and to preserve it' (EUD, 186/SKS 5, 190). A little later on, he adds:

Not only did he who looked improperly into the mirror lose his soul, but also the one who immediately went away and forgot what he looked like; and not only did he who remained standing all day in the marketplace lose his soul, but also the one who, although called in the first hour, soon left the work and once again stood in the marketplace; and not only did he who never came to the light lose his soul, but also the one who, although enlightened after having once tasted the heavenly gift, nevertheless fell away. (EUD, 194/SKS 5, 196–7)

*Sjel* in this work clearly does not mean 'mind' as it does in Anti-Climacus' ontology of self, but something more like selfhood or spirit. This sense of *sjel* would be similar to the sense in which Turnbull understands Anti-Climacus to be using *sjel*.

<sup>37</sup> There is an important asymmetry here too: being saved from despair is always a *redemption*, so while the despairing self was always in fact in despair, it is not the case that the self saved-from-despair was always in fact saved.

<sup>38</sup> Another term Anti-Climacus employs, e.g. SUD 31/SKS 11, 147.

However, Turnbull also conflates ‘having a soul’ with ‘being subject to soteriological judgement’, allowing him to claim that both prelinguistic infants and patients in a permanent vegetative state have souls.<sup>39</sup> Presumably (for a Christian like Anti-Climacus) such human beings are subject to soteriological judgement, and if *that* is what we mean by ‘soul’ then they cannot lose their soul. But it seems clear that Anti-Climacus thinks we can lose our self by failing to relate to ourselves in the right way, and this also seems to be what the upbuilding discourses understand by ‘losing one’s soul’.

How are we to make sense of all these competing, and seemingly self-contradictory, claims regarding the temporality of gaining and losing a self? The answer is perhaps to be found by following a suggestion made five years before *The Sickness Unto Death*, in *Either/Or*. In his discussion of the category of the ‘first love’, Judge William cites the claim in Hebrews 6:4–6 that those who have been converted and subsequently relapse can never be saved again: ‘Here, then, the first acquired its whole profound meaning. In the first, the whole profound Christian life proclaimed itself, and then the person who blundered in it was lost. But here the eternal is drawn too much into temporal qualifications’ (EO, 1:41/SKS 3, 48). The final sentence suggests that we make a category mistake if we consider questions of salvation in temporally schematized terms; William’s attempt to dismiss a potentially disturbing theological problem depends upon a denial that we can *fully* apply temporal categories such as duration, pastness, and completion to questions of faith and salvation.<sup>40</sup> In *Sickness Unto Death*, this idea manifests itself in the curious temporal characteristics of despair. Both despair and selfhood have something of the ‘eternal’ (*evighed*) in them, but this is not presented as simply infinitely extended temporal duration. Rather, the eternality of despair can be read as an expression of its resolutely present-tense character:

Every actual moment of despair is traceable to possibility; every moment he is in despair he *is bringing* it upon himself. It is always the present tense; in relation to the actuality there is no pastness of the past: in every actual moment of despair the person in despair bears all the past as present in possibility. (SUD, 17/SKS 11, 132–3)

This present-tense character is rarely discussed in the critical literature.<sup>41</sup> This is unfortunate, for I think attending to this present-tense character can also dissolve some other apparent aporias in both *The Sickness Unto Death* and elsewhere in the Kierkegaardian corpus. For instance, Anti-Climacus worries whether unconscious despair can properly be called despair (SUD, 42/SKS 11, 157), or whether the sin of the pagan can truly be called sin as it is not (consciously) sin before God (SUD, 81/SKS 11, 194–5). Part of the answer he gives is that ‘No one is born devoid of spirit,

<sup>39</sup> Turnbull 2011, pp.297–8.

<sup>40</sup> Which is not to say that, for Kierkegaard, there is *no* such legitimate application; for instance, consider the discourse ‘We Are Closer to Salvation now than when We Became Believers’ in *Christian Discourses*, discussed in Chapter 8.

<sup>41</sup> It is discussed briefly in Dreyfus 2008, p.15.



and no matter how many go to their death with this spiritlessness as the one and only outcome of their lives, it is not the fault of life' (SUD, 102/SKS 11, 214). This leads C. Stephen Evans to ask how one can *become* spiritless—that is, how one could come to 'lack a consciousness of God'<sup>42</sup>—unless one previously had such consciousness. To answer this question, Evans points towards what he takes to be a fundamental, pre-reflective awareness or 'universal knowledge of God' built into all subjects.<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, he concludes, Kierkegaard must hold that 'everyone has an unconscious relation to God and that every person has to some degree obscured this relation'.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, Davenport has to posit a level of 'primordial' choice operative in the non-reflective aesthete in order to explain how a life lived in 'immediate', unreflective categories can count as something for which she is nonetheless responsible.<sup>45</sup> In both cases, the question is how we can judge someone responsible for a condition they have never *consciously* chosen. I don't necessarily dispute the validity of the textual readings Evans and Davenport come up with to answer this question, nor that such readings are instructive. But if we take it that the questions here are irreducibly first-personal and present tense, then the initial motivation for these readings largely loses its force. Such questions as 'am I, now, in sin?' or 'am I, now, a self before God?' simply don't arise *from the perspective of* a subject who is immediate/aesthetic/spiritless in this way—any more than 'Am I the same person who went to sleep last night?' arises for a subject who is dreamlessly asleep.<sup>46</sup>

Still, Anti-Climacus does seem to emphasize continuity and consistency across time—precisely the characteristics which, as we've seen, suggest that Anti-Climacus belongs to the psychological criteria school of personal identity theory. And undeniably, Anti-Climacus *does* present sin and despair as states which can be described in terms of temporal extension, states with histories across time. It is perfectly possible to narrate histories of persons who never rise out of despair and into selfhood: 'Meanwhile, time passes... a self he was not, and a self he did not become, but he goes on living, qualified only by immediacy... he dies, the pastor ushers him into eternity for ten rix-dollars—but a self he was not, and a self he did not become' (SUD, 52/SKS 11, 167–8). Yet this is essentially the history of the *human being*, the synthesis of polar opposites which, only when it relates to itself, becomes a self. What I wish to claim here is that, in Anti-Climacian ontology, the temporality of *selves* differs from the temporality of *human beings*. Humans are things in the world, things that (as Heidegger famously said in his introductory lectures on Aristotle) are born, work, and die,<sup>47</sup> things that carve out spatio-temporal paths through the world and whose durations can be measured with stopwatches and calendars. With *selves*, it's not so simple. And the key to this complication is the self's qualification as *eternal*.

<sup>42</sup> Evans 2006, p.291.

<sup>43</sup> Evans 2006, p.292.

<sup>44</sup> Evans 2006, p.296.

<sup>45</sup> Davenport 2001a.

<sup>46</sup> On this last point, see Stokes 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in Philipse 1998, p.xiii.

## Self and Eternality

As noted above, the lives of ‘immediate’ people, whose lives lack a certain form of self-reflexivity, can be quite successfully narrated from the outside, with more-or-less definite beginnings, middles, and ends. Yet Anti-Climacus insists that such beings are not automatically selves, but can only become selves through a sort of self-conscious appropriation of themselves over and above any facts of psychological continuity their lives may have. The reach of this appropriative self-relation is extensive: *all* moments of one’s life are brought into selfhood through this mechanism. In this way, and as we saw in Chapter 5, it becomes clear that such self-relation is something more than just affective identification with psychologically similar parts of our lives, something that we notoriously can lose over time. The subjective character of such self-relation must therefore be something quite distinctive in that it can appropriate a *totality* that may incorporate significant psychological change across time. That distinctive property is what we’ve taken to be captured by Kierkegaard’s phenomenology of contemporaneity. And contemporaneity has a distinctive temporal character, one that sets it radically at odds with the neo-Lockean metaphysical project—and indeed with *all* standard metaphysical approaches to personal identity.

In the quote given above, despair, as the self’s misrelation to its facticity, has the curious quality of compressing the past into the present: ‘in relation to the actuality there is no pastness of the past: in every actual moment of despair the person in despair bears all the past as present in possibility’ (SUD, 17/SKS 11, 132–3). This interesting formulation places the emphasis on the present moment, removing the temporal distance and alterity conferred by pastness and bringing the self’s past contemporaneously into full presence in the present moment. What this suggests is that the *experience* of temporality in self-relation (including abortive despairing self-relation) differs radically from the temporality which applies when regarding human beings *as* human beings. Rather than diachronic continuity, self-relation apparently involves an experience of self in robustly present-tense, *synchronic* terms.

This present-tense character of all moments of the self is a function of the transfiguring effect of the self coming to relate itself to the eternal, to that which transcends time. Anti-Climacus insists in several places that the self has something of the eternal in it, something it can never rid itself of, and this language naturally invokes the idea of an eternal soul or immaterial substance underlying all moments of selfhood. It is indeed possible to make a *prima facie* case for the eternal as a form of ‘unchangeability’, which as Mark C. Taylor notes is a consistent referent of Kierkegaard’s use of the term eternal,<sup>48</sup> which would bring us back to continuity across time. However, if we accept that Anti-Climacus rejects ego-substantialism, it becomes difficult to see what’s left of a human being that’s unchangeable in this way. We have noted that sin has a kind of continuity and temporal extension to it,

<sup>48</sup> Taylor 1975, p.91.

and accordingly it is easy to assume that the continuity of sin and the continuity of non-despairing selfhood are somehow two forms of the same thing. In that case, if we could point to one human and say they are in despair and then point to another and say they are saved from despair, we would simply be offering soteriologically evaluative descriptions of their respective underlying psychological continuities: *this* temporally extended psychology is in a state of despair, *that* temporally extended psychology is not in despair and has therefore achieved selfhood. Yet the curious temporal characteristics we've come across so far—the presence of all moments of the past in despair, the apparently once-and-for-all character of despair and selfhood—suggest that the continuity conferred by the eternal is very different from these forms of straightforward psychological continuity.

Anti-Climacus tells us that becoming a self involves becoming conscious of oneself in relation to a series of increasingly adequate 'criteria' (*maalestok*)—other individuals, family, the state—leading ultimately to 'rest[ing] transparently in the power that established it' (SUD, 14/SKS 11, 130). The self becomes progressively more 'real' as it makes this ascent, finally attaining 'infinite reality' by coming to know itself as a self existing before God (SUD, 79/SKS 11, 193), with all the soteriological implications this entails.<sup>49</sup> Hence the emergence from despair into self-constituting self-relation involves increasing awareness of the individual's relation to the transcendent and eternal. And making this move changes how we experience time itself.

The person of immediacy (who on Anti-Climacus' line is already in despair) lives purely in the temporal flow of successive moments, and has nothing of the eternal other than the structural potential for eternity inherent in all humans. As despair becomes progressively more self-conscious, it attains to a correspondingly greater relation to the eternal, to that which transcends temporality. Hence the person trapped in a state *indeskuttethed* ('inclosing reserve' or 'withdrawal'), a form of despair (and so a form of selflessness according to Anti-Climacus), 'goes on living *horis succesivis* [hour after hour]', yet 'even if not lived for eternity, his hours have something to do with the eternal and are concerned with the relation of his self to itself—but he never really gets beyond that' (SUD, 64/SKS 11, 179). This self has at least *some* sort of relation to the eternal—in that he rejects it—but is nevertheless still embedded in time experienced as a mere succession of instants. Yet even though the self caught in this sort of despair tries to reject the eternal, spirit (self-relation) is *always* a relation *to* the eternal, and so its despairing self-(mis)relation is always present-tense:

To despair is a qualification of spirit and relates to the eternal in man. But he cannot rid himself of the eternal—no, never in all eternity. He cannot throw it away once and for all, nothing is more impossible; at any moment that he does not have it, he must have thrown it or is

<sup>49</sup> On this progression by relating to progressively fuller 'criteria', see Pattison 1997; Lillegard 2001; Stokes 2010a, pp.108–9.

throwing it away—but it comes again, that is, every moment he is in despair he is bringing his despair upon himself. (SUD, 17/SKS 11, 133)

Despair, in Alastair Hannay's terms, is 'an action of the spiritual subject unwilling to conform to its true self', and to the extent that despair is thus a qualification of spirit, it therefore fundamentally relates to the eternal.<sup>50</sup> Hence despair does not properly belong to the successive time in which the self tries to remain immersed; it still retains a covert, self-effacing relationship to the eternal that it is actively trying to avoid. In the most conscious forms of despair, the despair of defiance, this reaches the level of consciously railing against eternity and willing to remain in the concrete and temporal:

He is afraid of eternity, afraid that it will separate him from his, demonically understood, infinite superiority over other men, his justification, demonically understood, for what he is—Himself is what he wills to be. He began with the infinite abstraction of the self, and now he has finally become so concrete that it would be impossible to become eternal in that sense; nevertheless, he wills in despair to be himself. What demonic madness—the thought that most infuriates him is that eternity could get the notion to deprive him of his misery. (SUD, 72/SKS 11, 186)

Yet to defy the eternal in the self in this way is not to get rid of it, but in fact to actively relate to it in every moment. Insofar as defiance represents such a conscious, wilful misrelation within the spirit, it is 'the despairing misuse of the eternal within the self' or 'despair through the aid of the eternal'; for this reason it is simultaneously 'very close to the truth' and 'infinitely far away' (SUD, 67/SKS 11, 181).

It is also suggestive that, as we are told in a footnote, children (who Kierkegaard claims in *Johannes Climacus* do not possess self-consciousness [JC, 168/SKS 15, 54]) cannot despair because they only have the eternal present in them in potentiality (SUD, 49/SKS 11, 164). Children are clearly human beings, yet to the extent that they are not self-relationally conscious they are not (according to Anti-Climacus!) selves. Yet if eternity is only present in them if and to the extent that selfhood is, this implies that eternity is a function of self-consciousness, not a pre-existing condition of human beings. Once again, this works against a substantialist reading of Anti-Climacus: the 'eternal' in the self is no sort of immaterial, immortal soul that persists throughout human life. But if we posit a moment in human life where the eternal 'begins' (without seriously suggesting consciousness arises in a single, discriminable moment) we can have at best only a concept of the eternal as infinitely extended duration rather than atemporality—otherwise, how could the eternal have a *beginning*? Again, the idea seems to be that when self-consciousness begins, the self relates to something radically different from the temporality in which it has its (merely) human existence.

<sup>50</sup> Hannay 1987, p.32.

All of the above might seem both unfamiliar and unhelpfully esoteric to the reader looking to Kierkegaard to tell her something about personal identity. What is this 'eternal' aspect within the human, and why should non-theists care? I'll return to the second point in Chapter 9. As to the first, what is crucial to understand here is that for Kierkegaard's more religiously 'advanced' pseudonyms (unlike Judge William),<sup>51</sup> the eternal is an irreducibly soteriological category.

What the self comes into contact with in its engagement with the eternal is the possibility of eschatological judgement, which collects the totality of a life into a single object of assessment:

And when the hourglass has run out, the hourglass of temporality, when the noise of secular life has grown silent and its restless or ineffectual activism has come to an end, when everything around you is still, as it is in eternity, then . . . eternity asks you and every individual in these millions and millions about only one thing: whether you have lived in despair or not. (SUD, 27/SKS 11, 143)

In the face of this eschatological scenario, one is either in despair (and so not a self) or one has repented of despair and been saved (and has become a self). In the former case, 'eternity does not acknowledge you, it never knew you—or, still more terrible, it knows you as you are known and it binds you to yourself in despair' (SUD, 28/SKS 11, 144); in the latter case, one is judged as *not* being in despair, *whatever* has gone before. Hence the soteriological status of the totality depends entirely upon the *present moment's* mode of self-relation; and it is for this reason that we can speak of despair making it apparent we have *always* been in despair, or of being saved from despair as removing the very possibility of despair. Across the course of a human life it is entirely possible to slip back into despair or lose acquired selfhood; but the viewpoint of spirit is *entirely present tense* because entirely oriented towards how the diachronic totality to which I relate myself will be judged in eternity. There is no question of whether I *have been* in despair or how *many* times I have achieved selfhood; from the viewpoint of spirit, concerned for its salvation, there is only the present-tense question of whether *I am in despair*.

None of this is to suggest that the non-despairing self somehow lives outside time. Rather, the non-despairing self lives in a present moment that appropriates the past and future in a way that's transfigured by contact with the eternal. We'll have more to say about this in Chapter 8, but for the moment we can note that the self simultaneously relates itself to what is temporal—the diachronically extended or 'narrative' self—and the eternal. To employ the language of Vigilius Haufniensis, the pseudonym with whom Anti-Climacus is most closely aligned, the non-despairing self lives in the Moment (*Øjeblikket*), understood as the point where time and eternity intersect: 'The moment is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of *temporality* is posited, whereby time constantly

<sup>51</sup> I discuss Judge William's rather thin understanding of eternity in Stokes 2010b, esp. pp.500–1.

intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time' (CA, 89/SKS 4, 392). It is through this contact with the eternal, as Haufnienis puts it, that the division of time into past, present, and future 'acquires its significance' (CA, 89/SKS 4, 392)<sup>52</sup> by relating temporally schematised events to an eternal, transcendent goal. As Mark C. Taylor notes, Anti-Climacus selves are 'tensed': 'The past is the self's actuality, the future is its possibility, and the present is the moment in which freedom can be exercised by actualizing possibilities.'<sup>53</sup> Yet only in relation to the eternal, understood as final judgement over the whole of my life, does the past appear as the actuality for which I am responsible, the future as the stage for possibilities which I am to actualize, and the present as the place where I relate to the whole thing.

## Metaphysics from the Inside

What these admittedly dense observations on *The Sickness Unto Death* give us is a picture of Anti-Climacus selfhood that is at once intriguingly similar and profoundly different to the contemporary neo-Lockean picture of selfhood. The similarity is reasonably clear: insofar as he takes self-consciousness to constitute selfhood, Anti-Climacus seems to belong somewhere in the psychological continuity camp in the debate over personal identity. To the extent that he, and Kierkegaard generally, provides lucid and compelling phenomenologies of what it is to experience co-identity with one's remembered past and anticipated future—and what it is like *not* to do so—Kierkegaard stands as a valuable source of insight and observation for theorists working in that tradition.

But in important ways, Anti-Climacus, and Kierkegaard, are in fact doing something quite different to contemporary personal identity theorists. To reiterate, neo-Lockeans ask about the criteria for re-identifying selves at different points in time. Whatever the implications for moral imputability, self-interested concern, and survival, moral facts are taken to supervene upon metaphysical facts which in themselves are morally neutral.

Kierkegaard's approach, throughout his authorship, is very different. His focus, even in the pseudonymous works, is upbuilding, not just philosophical, and as a result, as Davenport puts it, 'his ontology of the person is not presented as a thesis in systematic metaphysics' but 'is offered as a conception to which we are implicitly committed in our practical experience',<sup>54</sup> an articulation of the structures of subjectivity disclosed to us via self-experience. Davenport takes it that 'we receive from Kierkegaard not a metaphysics of self-identity but a practical phenomenology',<sup>55</sup> but, echoing both Rudd and Evans, I'd suggest we resist drawing *too* sharp a dividing line between metaphysical and practical concerns about selfhood (both in Kierkegaard

<sup>52</sup> Indeed, it is only through positing soteriology that time truly comes to have *direction* for the subject; see Stokes 2010b.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor 1975, p.7.

<sup>54</sup> Davenport 2013, p.233.

<sup>55</sup> Davenport 2013, p.233.

and more generally).<sup>56</sup> Anti-Climacus is still making ontological claims, claims about what we essentially *are*, and to that extent he is still using metaphysical concepts. But his metaphysics are—and this may sound hopelessly contradictory to some ears—irreducibly first-personal. This is metaphysics *from the inside*. Despite the somewhat professorial character of Anti-Climacus' prose, he does not step back to impersonally consider the identity and persistence conditions of selves *as such*. Rather, he remains on the level at which the question of identity is asked in the first place: the question of *my* selfhood, a question that is inextricable from what Johannes Climacus earlier called my infinite, passionate interest in my eternal happiness. And as Anti-Climacus shows, this question can only be asked from the inside; unlike the traditional question about identity, it cannot be asked tenselessly or impersonally, but only *here, now*, and *for me*. Hence I cannot ask 'is A at  $t_1$  the same self as B at  $t_2$ ' if we are asking about *selves* in the Anti-Climacan sense; the only question I can ask—and given the moral and eschatological basis for the concern for selfhood that Anti-Climacus is starting from, the only question I should rightly be *concerned about*—is 'is the self I remember being one that I am to take responsibility for?' And given that there will only rarely be uncertainty about this, this really comes down to the question 'have I taken responsibility for my past and future?'

This may seem unsatisfying for personal identity theorists, but it does have the (perhaps philosophically dubious) merit of excusing Anti-Climacus from having to answer the difficult questions that have plagued that debate since its inception. If the question of the selfhood constituted by self-consciousness can only be asked from the here-and-now, then questions about the *persistence* of selves, and accordingly questions about unconsciousness, amnesia, fission, fusion, and so on, all dissolve into questions about the persistence conditions of *human beings*—an interesting metaphysical problem, certainly, but secondary to the question of the *self* in Anti-Climacus' terms. And in an important sense, it's also finally irrelevant to the concerns for responsibility, self-interested concern, and survival that motivate us to ask questions about personal identity in the first place. These concerns all imply a self that I cannot stop asking about or caring about even after being shown that my *human* persistence conditions won't furnish any non-trivial deep further fact about identity. It's *this* self, the incorrigible locus of self-concern, that is at the heart of Anti-Climacus' account, and which has its being in the moment in which it appropriates its life in its entirety as all that it is answerable for. How *long* such moments of self-conscious self-appropriation happen to last, a question about psychological continuity

<sup>56</sup> Rudd 2012, p.5. Evans (2006) sees Kierkegaard's position as 'relational but also metaphysical' (p.265) and as one that 'frequently intermixes ontological and ethical discourse', (p.285) and also endorses what he describes as a Jamesian sense of the word 'metaphysics' in the context of Kierkegaard: 'There is no hint here of finality and certainty, no claim to absolute knowledge but rather a confession that theoretical evidence is not decisive. However, James does not see this lack of absolute knowledge as a barrier to serious consideration of metaphysical questions or to earnest conviction that certain positions on these questions are true' (p.51).

which a neo-Lockean would naturally ask, actually has no bearing upon the question of selfhood as Anti-Climacus sees it. As a psychological state, self-constituting self-relation may persist for just an instant or an entire lifetime, but in the fundamental sense, selves only *exist* in *one* moment: *the* Moment. Right now.

So much, then, for metaphysics. But then, Kierkegaard would hardly be the only one to move from metaphysical accounts of personal identity to practical accounts, abandoning questions of numerical re-identification in favour of questions of practical characterization, in Schechtman's terms. In this century, Kierkegaard has been explicitly recruited for this practical approach to identity, especially its narrativist forms. But as we'll see in Chapter 7, the unique temporality of the self that we've been discussing also create headaches for that approach—while connecting Kierkegaard with important themes in contemporary phenomenology and even cognitive science.



## Practical and Narrative Identity

### The Rise of Narrative

Anglophone Kierkegaard reception over the last century falls into overlapping but distinct periods. Early commentators, like Walter Lowrie and David Swenson, approached Kierkegaard in a fairly literal, theological frame. Like many of us in our adolescent years, Kierkegaard then went through his ‘existentialist phase’, with readers emphasizing notions of radical freedom, subjectivity, and absurdity. A later cohort of readers, infused with the concerns of poststructuralism and deconstructionism, focused on themes of language, authorship, irony, the decentring of subjectivity and the final impossibility of meaning. Somewhat surprisingly, a stickler for Lutheran orthodoxy was now being read as announcing the possibility of a ‘religion without religion’.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of the twentieth century, Kierkegaard’s works went from being read as straightforward philosophical statements—the sort of interpretation Roger Poole later derided as ‘blunt reading’<sup>2</sup>—to deconstructive readings that seem to refuse any meaning to the text at all. Perhaps it was inevitable, then, that the ‘narrative turn’ in psychology, philosophy and the social sciences made itself felt in Kierkegaard Studies too. And it’s a good thing that it has: the narrativist research programme within Kierkegaard Studies over the last two decades has been among its most productive and exciting lines of inquiry.

In personal identity theory, the ‘narrative turn’ has been part of a wider move away from the strictly logical relationship of numerical identity. As the metaphysical project of specifying identity and persistence conditions for ‘selves’ or ‘persons’ continued to fragment across psychological, physical, reductive, and eliminativist approaches, an increasing number of writers began to change tack. Figures like Christine Korsgaard, Harry G. Frankfurt, and Charles Taylor began to talk of ‘selfhood’ or ‘personhood’ as constituted by practical rather than metaphysical considerations. In Schechtman’s terms, the focus shifted from *re-identification* to *characterization*: ‘Re-identification theorists ask what it means to say that a person at  $t_2$  is the same person as a person at  $t_1$ ; characterization theorists ask what it means to say that a particular characteristic is that of a given person’.<sup>3</sup> Narrative approaches to identity began to emerge as a subset of this approach, entering the fray from at

<sup>1</sup> Derrida 1995, p.49.

<sup>2</sup> Poole 1998, p.58 *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Schechtman 1996, p.73.

least two different directions: MacIntyre's discussion of persons as narratively constituted in *After Virtue*, and Ricoeur's long discussion of narrative as the poesis that mediates cosmological and subjective time<sup>4</sup> and mediates *idem* (sameness across time) and *ipse* (selfhood) in personal identity.<sup>5</sup> A range of positions have emerged concurrently within the narrative identity approach, from avowedly non-realist positions such as that of Daniel Dennett<sup>6</sup> to strongly realist ones such as that of John J. Davenport<sup>7</sup> and Anthony Rudd.<sup>8</sup> And Davenport and Rudd have sought to recruit Kierkegaard to the narrativist ranks, drawing on Kierkegaard's talk of teleologically qualified selves acquiring 'histories' to argue that Kierkegaardian selves are constituted by a specifically narrative form of continuity. Yet none of this has been without a backlash. Narrative approaches in general have come in for significant criticism,<sup>9</sup> while in Kierkegaard Studies commentators such as John Lippitt have argued that there are good reasons for being wary both of narrativity in general and of the claim that Kierkegaard himself endorses a narrative account of personal identity.<sup>10</sup>

The debate between narrativists and 'narrato-skeptics' has certainly been a productive one, and to the credit of narrativists that they have met many of the claims critics have put to them in the course of finessing their own positions. As something of a 'narrato-agnostic', I don't propose to enter this debate as a partisan on either side here.<sup>11</sup> Instead, I wish to show that *whatever* forms of practical identity Kierkegaard endorses, whether narrative or something else, this cannot be the whole story about personal identity for Kierkegaard. Rather, I will argue (in ways that have been gestured towards in previous chapters) that Kierkegaard's writings contain an analogue to a key distinction in recent discussions of selfhood: a distinction between the *minimal* or *core* and *narrative* or *autobiographical* self, or more broadly, between the phenomenally given *self* and the narratively constituted *person*. In this respect, I think Kierkegaard emerges as a figure who has something important to contribute to what I think will be the *next* move in personal identity theory: explicating how these two forms of selfhood interact.

<sup>4</sup> Ricoeur 1984.

<sup>5</sup> Ricoeur 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Dennett 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Davenport 2012 in particular contains Davenport's most thorough working out of his narrative realist position to date.

<sup>8</sup> Rudd's position too is evolving; Rudd 2012 offers a somewhat more nuanced realism than found in Rudd 2005. For further discussions see Rudd 2007, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Examples include Vice 2003; Lamarque 2004; Strawson 2004, 2012; Vollmer 2005; Williams 2009. Peter Goldie (2012) gives narrative a central place in his thought, but rejects the idea that selves are narratively constituted, while Daniel Hutto (2015) likewise defends a modest 'Narrative Self-Shaping Hypothesis' but not narrative self-constitution.

<sup>10</sup> Lippitt 2005, 2007; Dalsgaard 2010; Duckles 2007 (for a somewhat different set of objections to Davenport and Rudd); and several chapters in Lippitt and Stokes 2015.

<sup>11</sup> I've raised objections to narrative identity theory in Stokes 2006, 2012, 2015.

## From Metaphysical to Narrative Selfhood

As we've seen, personal identity theorists have largely focussed on questions of re-identification, and have assumed that the concerns that drive us to ask about personal identity, such as Schechtman's 'Four Features' (moral responsibility, self-interested concern, compensation, and survival)<sup>12</sup> are essentially derivative; the more fundamental question is what allows for such re-identification, and once we get clear about what we *are*, we'll be able to answer these subsidiary questions about imputability and survival. Just get the metaphysics right, and the practical questions will follow.

This assumption largely held until Bernard Williams' work on egocentric concern, which used ingenious thought-experiments to demonstrate a fissure between our first-personal, egocentrically concerned fear for the future and our third-personal judgements about the persistence of persons across time.<sup>13</sup> Parfit's 'constitutive reductionism'<sup>14</sup> about persons also showed that what we care about in egocentric concern and survival is separable from numerical identity: there may be forms of physical or psychological continuity that don't preserve numerical identity but that are nonetheless as good, or nearly as good, as ordinary survival, where 'good' is a function of self-reflexive concern. As we considered briefly in Chapter 3, many philosophers have asked whether teleportation—in which I'm disintegrated in one place and an exact replica created in another place—is properly regarded as a form of transport, or a form of suicide. Ultimately this question may only be decidable by reference not to metaphysical facts, but to practical concerns.<sup>15</sup> It might not be survival in any metaphysically 'serious' sense of numerical identity, but it might just preserve enough of what we care about in ordinary survival for us to care about our teleportation replicas in the way we ordinarily care about our future person-stages.

These practical concerns, it is claimed, bring forward a new way of understanding the self: not as an enduring substance, but as a function of practical relationships. Identity, on this view, emerges from a weave of personal, social, and political relations between human beings. Hence this form of personal identity, and the *person* whose identity it delineates, is *born normative*. It is not a non-moral substratum onto which moral concepts like imputability or desert may be overlaid, but instead a thoroughly moral, social, practical being in its very constitution. Recall that Locke, though largely conflating 'self' and 'person', nonetheless regarded 'person' as a 'forensick' term,<sup>16</sup> a way of picking out individual nodes of moral imputability within the interpersonal world. In Davenport's terms, 'person' in this sense is 'not a natural kind, but an essentially practical concept, or a set of closely related practical concepts ... persons

<sup>12</sup> Schechtman 1996, pp.2–3 *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> Williams 1973, pp.46–63. I discuss this paper, and the fissure it brings to salience, in Stokes 2013b.

<sup>14</sup> This is Parfit's own description of his position, which he defines thus: 'though a person is distinct from that person's body, and from any series of thoughts and experiences, the person's existence just consists in them' (Parfit 2011, p.422).

<sup>15</sup> On which see e.g. Johnston 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Locke 1975, p.346.

may be defined as beings capable of moral responsibility, or (more widely) as beings who deserve a distinctive sort of moral consideration because it is normal for them (or part of their function) to develop the capacities sufficient for moral responsibility'.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, C. Stephen Evans calls the non-metaphysical form of personal identity a 'relational achievement theory' of the self, which 'attempts to say what a self is, not by describing a type of entity or specifying an entity that possesses certain natural properties, but rather by viewing the self in terms of its achievements and relationships. Being a self is not being a special type of entity, but rather it is a matter of having a special status, a status that is linked to social relationships.'<sup>18</sup>

Not everyone has signed up to the distinction between metaphysical and practical selfhood. Rudd, for instance, has expressed scepticism with the idea that 'the question of what we are fully can helpfully be separated out from the question of what matters to us'.<sup>19</sup> And indeed practical identity may indeed be inextricable from questions of numerical identity in many ways: for instance, numerical physical identity may influence (though perhaps not fully determine) many of our ideas of practical identity, such as when we use bodily continuity to reject false memories.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, the distinction is at least analytically useful in that it allows us to talk about, in Christine Korsgaard's terms, the 'continuity of identity and of agency' that 'in choosing our careers, and pursuing our friendships and family lives, we both presuppose and construct'<sup>21</sup> without having to give a reductive account of what holds that identity together diachronically. Such reductionism either tends to run into too many metaphysical difficulties (as in neo-Lockeanism) or simply leaves out too much of what we care about in discussing identity (as in animalism).

It is crucial to note here that on this understanding, the self is not *merely* something that emerges out of interpersonal relationships and social conventions such as naming. It is more than just a convenient way of denoting individual points of interaction and responsibility in a social nexus, a 'mere designation' as the Buddhist sage Nāgasena has it.<sup>22</sup> Rather, it is also, and indeed predominantly, something that emerges from the self-interpreting activity of conscious human beings, 'the product of conceiving and organizing one's life in a certain way' in Dan Zahavi's phrase.<sup>23</sup> Korsgaard tells us that 'what it is to be a person, or a rational agent, is just to be engaged in the activity of constantly making yourself into a person'.<sup>24</sup> Such a process of self-making involves a

<sup>17</sup> Davenport 2012, p.12. Davenport goes on to add 'three further features' to Schechtman's increasingly canonical four: virtue, authenticity, and autonomy.

<sup>18</sup> Evans 2006, p.264.

<sup>19</sup> Rudd 2012, p.5.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 3; also Stokes 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Korsgaard 1989, p.113.

<sup>22</sup> The *Milinda Panha*, written around 100BCE, tells of the conversations between King Milinda (the Indo-Greek ruler Menander I) and the sage Nāgasena. Upon meeting Nāgasena and asking his name, Milinda is told: 'Sire, I am known as Nāgasena,' but 'this "Nāgasena" is only a designation, a concept, an expression, a mere name because there is no person as such that is found' (Menis 1993, p.28). What then follows is a wonderfully succinct explanation of the Buddhist *anatta* ('no-self') doctrine, including the famous chariot analogy.

<sup>23</sup> Zahavi 2005, p.105.

<sup>24</sup> Korsgaard 2009, p.41.

degree of reflexive evaluation and self-shaping, of identifying with certain motives (as in Frankfurt)<sup>25</sup> and self-defining 'ground projects' (as in Williams).<sup>26</sup> This is not simply a matter of creating the self *ex nihilo* but of appropriating, moulding, and directing an identity that is always-already situated within, and partly determined by, a given historical and social context. Hence identity is not a default state of the human animal, but a state that needs to be achieved and maintained—opening up the possibility of humans who are not yet selves, as with foetuses for instance, or no longer selves, as with permanent vegetative state patients.

## The Practical Kierkegaard

Right away we can note that the relational, interpersonal character of practical identity coheres with the distinctively relational nature of selfhood in Kierkegaard. From *Either/Or* to *The Sickness Unto Death* the defining feature of self-constitution is a sort of relation to oneself, which in the latter work is also linked to a series of progressively more adequate relations to others: to the family, the state, and ultimately to God (SUD, 79/SKS 11, 193). In the less overtly theological first half of *Sickness* we are told that 'in relating to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it' (SUD, 14/SKS 11, 130, trans. modified), thereby centralizing both self-relation and other-relation in the process of self-constitution (albeit in a highly asymmetrical way: the self relates to its creator and thereby relates to itself *as creature*). This self-relation, which Anti-Climacus describes in *Practice in Christianity* as a 'redoubling' (*Fordobelse*) that creates a 'duplexity' (*Dobbelthed*) in the self, is essentially linked to freedom and thus to agency:

The magnet draws the iron to itself, but the iron is no self; in this relation, therefore, to draw to itself is a singleness. But a self is a redoubling, is freedom; therefore in this relation truly to draw to itself means to posit a choice. (PC, 159/SKS 12, 163)

The magnet analogy recalls Fichte's use of the same image: the propositions 'the magnet attracts the iron' and 'the iron is attracted by the magnet' exist in a reciprocal relationship (neither is primary), but when we reflect on that reciprocity *itself*, it becomes apparent that 'in addition to the iron and the magnet an intelligent being must be present, observing both, uniting the concepts of both in his consciousness' via a free activity.<sup>27</sup> By relating to itself, the human being posits itself *as a self*: not just a locus of conscious experience, but of freedom, decision, and action. Importantly, though, for both Fichte and Kierkegaard, there is nothing homuncular in this picture of the self. As Mooney puts it, 'a Kierkegaardian self is not a "little king" or ruler within a body, or within a sphere of projects and activities, feelings and beliefs. It is

<sup>25</sup> Frankfurt 1988, pp.11–25.

<sup>26</sup> Williams 1982, pp.1–19. On 'ground projects' in Kierkegaard, see e.g. Mooney 1996, p.73.

<sup>27</sup> Fichte 1982, p.150.

instead just the field of its relationships, relating to itself, and to a grounding power.<sup>28</sup>

The clearest statement of identity as *practical* in Kierkegaard's corpus, however, is not to be found in the schematics of Anti-Climacus, but in the vision of self-constituting choice offered by Judge William in the second half of *Either/Or*. According to William, for a human being to become a self is for her to attain a particular type of psychological continuity through time, without which her entire personality collapses into atomistic incoherence:

Or can you think of anything more appalling than having it all end with the disintegration of your essence into a multiplicity, so that you actually become several, just as that unhappy demoniac became a legion, and thus you would have lost what is the most inward and holy in a human being, the binding power of the personality? (EO, 2:160/SKS 3, 158)

A human being in such a state amounts to no more than a sequence of psychological events, devoid of any internal coordinating principle or coherence. Someone who simply bounces from passion to passion, mood to mood, with no underlying projects or commitments to coordinate these events, is reduced *to* these moments. In Judge William's terminology, such a subject is not a self; instead of achieving selfhood, personality (*personlighed*) 'withers away in atrophy' (EO, 2:163/SKS 3, 160). What is lost in such a case is the internal thematic and developmental coherence of the personality, that which unifies it across time and gives the subject 'continuity with the past and the future' (EO, 2:263/SKS 3, 250). Obtaining such continuity requires an integration of consciousness (EO, 2:177/SKS 3, 173) that 'submerges' the raw material of psychological life—dispositions, memories, emotions, intentions—into a consolidated identity via a process of *choice* (EO, 2:163/SKS 3, 160). This submersion amounts to adopting all these psychological moments as a totality for which the self is answerable, thereby regarding its concretion as a temporally extended *ethical task* rather than as a mere sequence or bundle of psychological events:

The individual, then, becomes conscious as this specific individual with these capacities, these inclinations, these drives, these passions, influenced by this specific social milieu, as this specific product of a specific environment. But as he becomes aware of all this, he takes upon himself responsibility for it all. He does not hesitate over whether he will take this particular thing or not, for he knows that if he does not do it something much more important will be lost. (EO, 2:251/SKS 3, 239)

In this way, the immediate, given content of the personality is changed into what Davenport calls 'volitional character constituted by patterns of earnest caring', converting a sequence of disconnected moments into 'self-guiding patterns' intelligible in terms of volitional commitments.<sup>29</sup> The key themes of self-constitution that recur in the more technical (and more avowedly theological) Anti-Climacan writings

<sup>28</sup> Mooney 1996, p.98.

<sup>29</sup> Davenport 2001b, pp.280–1.

are already clearly at work here: reflexivity/redoubling, freedom, choice. By relating to itself and to the context in which it finds itself, a human consciousness attains identity, (conditioned) autonomy, and diachronic continuity as a self or person.

It may be objected that even if this is indeed a form of practical rather than metaphysical identity, there is still nothing terribly *narrative* about this conception of self-constitution. Indeed, Judge William's account of self-consolidating choice has also been likened to philosophical conceptions of the self such as William's 'ground projects' and Frankfurt's account of self-constitution via higher-order volitions,<sup>30</sup> neither of which centralize the concept of narrative. Moreover, as the discussion in Chapter 6 might suggest, the Judge's talk of achieving 'continuity' of personality, and of the subject finding herself 'in continuity with the past and the future' of her 'concrete personality' might initially sound rather neo-Lockean, but that doesn't entail that it is also narrativist. Contemporary neo-Lockeans speak of various forms of psychological continuity or connectedness as preserving personal identity across time; why mightn't Judge William's self-constituting 'choice' be regarded simply as securing such psychological continuity by giving the personality a stable, diachronically extended volitional framework? Why invoke the stronger concept of narrativity here at all?

## The Narrative Approach

Narrative identity theories vary widely in scope, motivation and underlying metaphysical assumptions, and so speaking of narrative identity per se can be quite fraught. Narrative identity is still relatively new, and the differences between the various forms of narrative approach are still being articulated. Minimally, we could say that the narrative approach is perhaps best understood as an attempt to specify more fully a distinctive form of diachronic coherence or sequential integration that organizes a set of temporally separate psychological events and properties into an enduring person. But even that less-than-informative description applies only awkwardly to some narrativists, such as Goldie,<sup>31</sup> Velleman, and Hutto, who give narrative an important role in self-*understanding* without wanting to make any claims for narrative self-*constitution*. Still, even these non-constitution versions of the narrative approach arguably fall under Davenport's *Signature Narrative Thesis*: 'each person's individual identity *is*, or *depends on*, an understanding he has of his life in narrative form, as a development from his past towards his future prospects,

<sup>30</sup> Davenport 2001a, p.87; 2001b, pp.278, 290. See also Rudd 2001, p.138.

<sup>31</sup> 'A narrative is distinct from what it is a narrative *of*. To fail to maintain this distinction is to lose the distinction between, on the one side, language and thought, and, on the other side, the world, between representation and what is represented' and 'one's narrative sense of self as I conceive it really has no direct connection with the metaphysical question of one's identity over time' (Goldie 2012, pp.6 and 117).

ending in his death'.<sup>32</sup> That definition is capacious enough to fit a variety of different and conflicting understandings of the relationship between narrative, narration, and the self: that the activity of self-narration brings the self into being; that the self already exists and is *already* narrative in character prior to its narration (as in Davenport); or that identity and narrative stand in a relationship of 'mutual presupposition', as in MacIntyre.<sup>33</sup>

'Narrative' is in turn rarely well-defined in the literature, and such definitions as have been given need to walk a thin line between being too strongly literary in character to be credible, on the one hand, and too thin to deserve the name on the other. One point that is sometimes emphasized is that narratives are more than mere causal sequences, and more than mere chronicles or annals.<sup>34</sup> Narratives have an overall shape and trajectory, which gives them a unity that goes beyond mere continuity between discrete points in time. The difference between narrative continuity and psychological continuity per se tracks this difference between a narrative and a mere list of temporally ordered events:<sup>35</sup> the former has a shape for which its beginning and end are essential, while the latter simply recounts events falling between two given points of time.<sup>36</sup> The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle could begin and end in different years and still be perfectly intelligible as a chronicle, whereas if *Beowulf* stopped suddenly before the fight with Grendel at Heorot, or began suddenly with the journey to the Mere, it would be a *broken* narrative, containing a comprehensible sequence of events but only *narratively* intelligible as a fragment of a larger, lost narrative. While a causal sequence explains a certain kind of relationship between two or more temporally distant events, narratives do more than this: they explain a sequence of events in a way that imbues it with a form of thematic and purposive coherence. As Goldie puts it, the way in which emotional response and evaluation infuse, shape, and colour narrative,<sup>37</sup> as well as its distinctive capacity to connect events to broader contexts, gives narratives a 'special explanatory, revelatory, and expressive power' compared to merely causal accounts.<sup>38</sup> (On some versions of the narrative approach, such as that of Rudd and of David Carr, narratives are also the very condition for us being able to individuate events in a sequence *at all*; narratives do not so much connect events as *make* them the events they are.) Narrativity gives events and actions what Karen Jones calls a 'trajectory-dependant property',<sup>39</sup> a property that events only have by virtue of being part of a temporally extended process that is directed towards some sort of end or goal. Hence, in Jones'

<sup>32</sup> Davenport 2012, p.2. Goldie won't necessarily fit under the last clause, however, as he rejects the idea that a narrative must encompass a *whole* life.

<sup>33</sup> MacIntyre 1984, p.203.

<sup>34</sup> See e.g. Goldie 2012, p.2.

<sup>35</sup> For a defence of narrative that seeks to avoid the 'too literary vs too thin' problem in a way that makes clear what narrativity adds to mere psychological continuity, see Schechtman 2015.

<sup>36</sup> It should be noted that this contrast between chronicle and narrative is not universally accepted; see e.g. Ricoeur 1984, p.148.

<sup>37</sup> Goldie 2012, p.11. See also Rudd 2009, p.62.

<sup>38</sup> Goldie 2012, p.46.

<sup>39</sup> Jones 2008, pp.271–5.



examples, 'being a journey to Mordor' is a trajectory-dependent property, but 'has been here since Roman times' is not.

This notion of narrative trajectory involves a fundamentally *teleological* dimension. Narratives, whether short-term local ones or life-long, all-encompassing ones, have an internal logic oriented towards their end. Narrativists differ as to how important teleology is to narrative identity, but there is nonetheless a whiff of teleology in even the simplest narratives by dint of their purposiveness. To adapt an example from MacIntyre,<sup>40</sup> if I walk into a lecture theatre and crack two eggs into a bowl, this behaviour will only make sense with reference to some end towards which the activity is directed: making a cake? Demonstrating some philosophical point to my students? Satisfying a sudden desire to drink raw eggs like Rocky Balboa? Hence the entire sequence of pulling out the bowl, cracking the eggs, pouring them from the shells into the bowl and so on, is only narratively intelligible with reference to some telos. That telos in turn may only make sense relative to some larger telos—perhaps I'm cracking eggs to demonstrate a philosophical point about identity in order to successfully teach a unit on metaphysics for instance. Not all narrativists will go so far as to say that there is some *ultimate* telos that does, or should, make narrative sense of all actions performed within a single life; but even without this there does appear to be some minimal level of teleology (in a fairly prosaic sense) in even the simplest of narratives.

A closely related further aspect to narrative theories, again held by some narrativists but not all, is that narrative compels us 'to think of ourselves as temporally extended *wholes*'.<sup>41</sup> It may be that key parts of our life-narratives are inaccessible to us, such as our conception, birth, and death,<sup>42</sup> and indeed our entire future is subject to radical and unforeseeable contingencies; but according to the more MacIntyrean narrativists we must nonetheless think of ourselves *as* a unified whole. If we want our particular actions to be intelligible to ourselves,<sup>43</sup> on this line, we must see them as embedded in some larger narrative, which in turn will make sense with reference to yet larger narratives; it seems to follow that at some ultimate (if inaccessible) level there will be a narrative that holds together and makes sense of our entire life. This narrative needn't be articulated fully, but *some* degree of conscious self-narration is essential to constituting oneself as an agent—we cannot, on this view, understand ourselves and enact, evaluate, and modify our practical identities unless we at least

<sup>40</sup> MacIntyre's version (which involves making an entire cake) is in 1984, p.209. His point is twofold: each action in the sequence is only comprehensible *as* an action relative to the narrative of the sequence (compare the 'narrative holism' of Carr and Rudd), and that this narrative is only intelligible as part of some larger goal-directed sequence of activities.

<sup>41</sup> Rudd 2007, p.545, emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> On conception and birth, see Ricoeur 1992, p.160. For discussions of the problems death poses for narrative theory, see Lippitt 2007; Behrendt 2007; Stokes 2006. Death has also been taken to be *essential* to narrative intelligibility e.g. Malpas 1998; against this, see e.g. Behrendt 2015, Pattison 2015.

<sup>43</sup> This is the motivation Velleman in particular cites for a narrative agency theory. See Velleman 2006a, pp.203–23.

partially and at least some of the time articulate our identities in narrative terms.<sup>44</sup> Not all narration need be explicit, however, nor need it rise to the level of telling an integrated life story; in fact, very little of it will.

Again, narrativists differ on whether this narrative self is constituted by our narration (either tacit or explicit) of events that are in themselves non-narrative or (as in Ricoeur) somehow *proto*-narrative, or whether real life has a narrative structure prior to our narration of it. Davenport falls resolutely into the latter camp. He coins the term *narravive*, ‘a story that lives, the development of which is, for the most part, prior to its telling or rational interpretation’<sup>45</sup> to refer to the truth-maker of the narratives we tell about ourselves, and holds this truth-maker to have something akin to narrative properties already. So by deploying the *narravive*, Davenport steers around one of the standard objections to narrative identity approaches—that they conflate life and art and so end up giving accounts of identity that are untrue to messy lived experience—by claiming that *narravives* are strongly analogous to, but are fuller and more complex than, literary artefacts. Hence the near-isomorphism of explicit narratives to *narravives*, as in a biography which tells the story of a life without including every single detail therein. He also escapes the objection that stories contain their ending prefigured in their narrative logic (a good story *has* to end the way it does) whereas lives are open-ended and subject to radical contingency, by claiming that ‘a living *narravive* is incomplete and still growing, and modally extended into nonactual but possible continuations into the future, which are closed only at the agent’s death’.<sup>46</sup>

The features of narrative identity theories I’ve described—teleology, holism,<sup>47</sup> and realism—open many narrative approaches up to a number of criticisms. Here, I’d like to focus on how one particular strand of criticism of narrative identity impacts upon the claim that Kierkegaard is a sort of narrativist. This criticism draws our attention both to important structural features of Kierkegaard’s account of selfhood, and to what may be one of his most important contributions given where the debate over personal identity appears to be headed.

## The Narrative Kierkegaard

*Either/Or* Part II and *The Sickness Unto Death* do, in fact, have much to offer those seeking to recruit Kierkegaard to the cause of narrative identity, not least in their emphases on how the self comes to acquire itself in the form of a *history*, and their

<sup>44</sup> Cf. what Schechtman (1996, pp.114–19) calls the ‘Articulation Constraint’.

<sup>45</sup> Davenport 2012, p.71. <sup>46</sup> Davenport 2012, p.72.

<sup>47</sup> In a posthumously published paper, Williams offers a criticism that combines worries about holism with the ‘too literary’ objection: ‘fictional characters have a special unity that no real life can have, that the end of them is present at their beginning... their wholeness is already there, and ours is not’ (Williams 2009, p.7).

developmental anthropology whereby selves come to progressively fuller understandings of themselves. MacIntyrean Kierkegaardians<sup>48</sup> (principally Davenport and Rudd) argue that Judge William's developmental anthropology in *Either/Or*, which we discussed above, makes his account of selfhood teleological in character in a way straightforward neo-Lockean psychological continuity theories are not. Selves acquire a 'history' in a narrative sense (the Danish *historie*, like the German *geschichte*, means both 'history' and 'story') that provides a teleological understanding of where we are going in terms of where we have been.<sup>49</sup> The contents of immediate selfhood only acquire a history when the subject 'acknowledges identity with himself' and that he 'is the person he is *only through this history*' (EO, 2:216/SKS 3, 207, my emphasis). And essential to this history is *development*: lives such as those of mystics, which merely oscillate between ecstatic highs and frightful 'flat moments', have 'movement, but not development' and so only acquire a history 'in the same sense that one speaks of the history of a plant' (EO, 2:242/SKS 3, 231). A plant gets bigger, but it does not have a developmental history in which the present can only be understood by reference to the story of the past and in reference to an overall telos.<sup>50</sup> The sort of ethical life Judge William advocates involves self-constitution via commitments such as marriage, which *require* temporal extension and must unfold in time for their full meaning to be evident. Such commitments involve, argues Rudd, relatively localized teloi that derive their meaning by reference to an overarching telos of choosing to be a coherent, autonomous self, which in turn only makes sense with reference to a third kind of telos, an orientation to the Good-as-such, or what Judge William calls choosing the self in its 'eternal validity'.<sup>51</sup>

As we saw in Chapter 6, *The Sickness Unto Death* is also concerned with self-relation and continuity, and, like the Judge, Anti-Climacus regards selfhood as a product of a particular mode of self-relation. To recap, Anti-Climacus distinguishes between the human being (*mennenske*)—a synthesis of opposed elements such as finitude and infinitude, physical and mental—and the self (*selv*). The self is 'spirit' (*aand*), a task presented to the human being—'Every human being is a psychical-physical synthesis intended to be spirit' (SUD, 43/SKS 11, 158)—and is constituted when the human being 'relates to itself' and simultaneously to 'the power that established it' (SUD, 14/SKS 11, 130). Like Judge William's self, the Anti-Climacan self takes responsibility for its *entire* life in its concretion, and turns the immediate psychological material it finds itself to be into an ethically qualified task. The self is a lifelong *totality* that relates to itself in a self-integrating, self-constituting, and

<sup>48</sup> A term coined by Lippitt 2007, p.50.

<sup>49</sup> 'The self has a history, and its nature is given by the sort of continuity involved in the story it can tell about itself' (Weston 2008, p.165).

<sup>50</sup> There may be exceptions. If you've ever seen an agave plant, after twenty years, suddenly grow a massive bloom spike taller than a house to spread its seeds before dying, it's very hard not to narrativize this plant's life and death in teleological terms.

<sup>51</sup> Rudd 2012, p.75.

self-directing way—which, initially at least, sounds quite close to both Judge William and to contemporary narrativism.

So it seems clear that Judge William and Anti-Climacus both depart from straightforward psychological continuity theory, in ways that seem friendly, at least, to contemporary narrative theory. The notion of the self as a totality is also a decidedly narrativist one—and indeed this is one of the most important insights that narrativists offer us in their readings of Kierkegaard, for as we'll see in Chapter 8, the idea that I am a totality I am to relate to in a concerned way is essential to Kierkegaard's conception of the self. Simple psychological continuity doesn't provide the notion of a human being's life as a defined whole in this way; what it furnishes is more like chronicle than narrative.

Anti-Climacus' formula might also seem to help narrativists get around what we might call the 'constitution problem' for narrative identity theories. A standard objection to narrative identity theories is that, as Goldie and Richard Menary object, they confuse narratives with what they are the narratives *of*. A claim that 'the subject of the experiences that the story is about' is identical with 'the story that relates the experiences' would, in Menary's view, be 'close to incoherent'.<sup>52</sup> This doesn't arise for a narrativist like Goldie, for whom self-constitution is not at issue: I simply tell narratives about myself without *being* those narratives.<sup>53</sup> But when the claim is that in narratively understanding and shaping our lives we thereby *author* (or at least co-author) ourselves, we run into what Korsgaard calls the 'Paradox of Self-Constitution':<sup>54</sup> how can we be both constitutor and constituted? 'How,' as Hutto asks, 'can we be the products of acts of narration, if in some sense we are responsible for the production of the relevant self-making narratives?'<sup>55</sup> When Judge William explains that 'Through the individual's intercourse with himself the individual is made pregnant by himself and gives birth to himself' (EO, 2:259/SKS 3, 246), just who's giving birth to who here?

Kierkegaard's relational self model, as articulated most fully by Anti-Climacus, seems to offer an easy answer to this: it's the human being, a synthesis of physical and psychological factors that 'gives birth to itself' by relating to itself in a certain way. At first blush, this is not dissimilar to 'constitution' views of identity such as that of Lynne Rudder Baker, whereby a human body constitutes a person without being identical *to* that person, much as a lump of marble constitutes Michelangelo's *David*.<sup>56</sup> It's also quite tantalizingly similar to what we find in the more materialist narrative accounts, such as Dennett's, according to which it's the brain or the organism that creates the narrative self through telling stories with that self as its

<sup>52</sup> Menary 2008, p.72. Rudd (2012, p.185) replies that a MacIntyrean narrativist can overcome this by pointing to the relationship of 'mutual presupposition' between self and narrative.

<sup>53</sup> Goldie 2012, p.131.

<sup>54</sup> Korsgaard 2009, pp.41–2.

<sup>55</sup> Hutto 2007, p.6.

<sup>56</sup> This is the central theme of Baker 2000.

(fictional) protagonist.<sup>57</sup> Borrowing from Korsgaard's invocation of Aristotle, a human being 'making itself into itself' might here be regarded as part of what it is for a human animal to realize its potential to be a human being *properly*, just as living a giraffish life is what it is for a giraffe to be continually making itself into a giraffe (and 'No one is tempted to say: "how can the giraffe make itself into itself unless it is already there?"' The picture here is not of a craftsman who is, mysteriously, his own product. The picture here is of the self-constitutive process that is the essence of life. The paradox of self-constitution, in this context, is no paradox at all.)<sup>58</sup>

As we've seen, for Kierkegaard, 'self' (*selv*) names an *achievement* of the human being (*menneske*), not something we are by default. On the narrativist reading, a diachronically extended human being achieves selfhood by taking ownership of its life, gathering together the strands of its biological, historical, social, political, and spiritual being into a coherent, narratively qualified whole. In relating to itself in its concretion in this way, and also in relating to others (including the 'power that established it') a human animal acquires the status of a self: a self-conscious, self-reflexive being with trajectory-dependent properties, able to assess, shape, and redirect its own character. And this is also teleological in that, as Judge William puts it in the continuation of the quote given above, the 'self' is both the human being it actually is and the ideal self it is striving to become:

Through the individual's intercourse with himself the individual is made pregnant by himself and gives birth to himself. The self the individual knows is simultaneously the actual self and the ideal self, which the individual has outside himself as the image in whose likeness he is to form himself, and which on the other hand he has within himself, since it is he himself. Only within himself does the individual have the objective toward which he is to strive, and yet he has this objective outside himself as he strives towards it. (EO, 2:259/SKS 3, 246–7)

Rudd makes much of this bivalent character of narrative selfhood, taking narrative identity to be (in a somewhat thicker version of Ricoeur's *idem* and *ipse*) a negotiation between 'self-shaping' and 'self-acceptance'. The paradox of self-constitution that the Judge is wrestling with here is that I don't have to (and indeed, for moral reasons, must not) simply accept my character, beliefs, and relationships as I find them, but at the same time I can't make myself into whatever I want by sheer force of will.<sup>59</sup> Rather I must negotiate between the ideal I strive to achieve and the constraints imposed upon me by my facticity. I am neither wholly determined nor a Sartrean locus of absolute freedom, but a being that is both simultaneously free and constrained. It's in reflectively owning and occupying that tension, negotiating my way through the demands made upon me and the limits of my concretion, that I attain a narratively qualified practical identity.

<sup>57</sup> Mooney (1996, p.99) explicitly invokes Dennett's conception of the self as a 'narrative centre of gravity' in explicating Kierkegaard's view.

<sup>58</sup> Korsgaard 2009, pp.41–2.

<sup>59</sup> Rudd 2012, pp.75–6.

Perhaps for this reason, both Davenport and Rudd reject the idea that the self is something distinct *from* the human being, understood as a concatenation of physical and psychological factors, both in their exegesis of Kierkegaard and in their accounts of narrative selfhood as such. Davenport explicitly identifies the self with the totality of the volitional character in a way that is clearly meant to avoid any Cartesian connotations. Following Hannay,<sup>60</sup> Davenport insists on two 'levels of character: the outer and the inner' operative in Judge William's moral psychology; but for Davenport, this must be understood as an internal relation within the dispositional and volitional structure of the human being itself: there 'is not a set of character-traits that the self *has* as accidental properties; rather this character *is* the self'.<sup>61</sup> There is no sense in Davenport's picture of a self *distinct from* that structure. Rudd, too, insists that 'the self is not some isolatable thing, independent of all these [psychological] characteristics; it is what is made manifest in the common style or manner of being in the world that they express'.<sup>62</sup> Hence the human being and the self are not separate entities, such that we can speak of one creating the other. Rather, 'self' designates a human being that has attained a certain self-reflexive state.

So far, so good. However, these responses don't fully obviate the self-constitution problem. Evans recognizes as much when he points out that 'Kierkegaard's view cannot be a *simple* achievement theory' because 'the self that the individual is charged with failing to become is in some sense the self the individual *is* already'.<sup>63</sup> Kierkegaard's concept of selfhood is a thick concept, and (as we should expect given the 'born normative' character of practical identity) a morally charged one: we are ethically enjoined to *become ourselves* (e.g. EO, 2:177/SKS 3, 173). But then, if we *fail* to become ourselves—that is, to attain the status of selfhood—who gets the blame for this failure? Can blame be imputed to non-selves? If 'self' is doing the same sort of work as 'person' generally does in both neo-Lockean and practical identity approaches, this seems problematic, because it appears being a *self* is another name for being a morally responsible agent. How can a human being who fails to become a self be held responsible for this failure, when becoming a self is in turn a *condition* for being the sort of being who can be morally responsible?

The answer to this paradox that writers like Rudd, Davenport, and Evans have offered is that selfhood, both in Kierkegaard and in their own narrative views, is essentially a scalar concept. Rudd is forced to acknowledge that Kierkegaard must have two senses of 'self': a weak sense in which a self is just a 'self-conscious rational being' and a stronger sense in which selfhood is 'an ideal to be realized' by that subject.<sup>64</sup> This is one point on which Rudd and Lippitt are in agreement: 'anyone capable of responding to such a call must already [be] a self in some more minimal sense'.<sup>65</sup> Evans also accepts that 'there is a tremendous difference between what we could call the minimal self, who is a "bit of a subject", and the responsible self who

<sup>60</sup> Hannay 1998, pp.335–6.

<sup>63</sup> Evans 2006, pp.267–8.

<sup>61</sup> Davenport 2001b, p.279.

<sup>64</sup> Rudd 2007, p.547.

<sup>62</sup> Rudd 2005, p.424.

<sup>65</sup> Lippitt 2007, p.60, n.14.

has a formed character' and that both must exist in Kierkegaard's anthropology in order for the former 'self "of sorts"' to become the latter.<sup>66</sup> Davenport has recently articulated a complex typology of levels of narrative unity, beginning at the level of bare unity of apperception (what he calls unity-0, the ability 'to recognize experiences across time as belonging to the same animal')<sup>67</sup> through the capacity for planning agency (unity-1) all the way through to unity-3 (volitional wholeheartedness) and unity-4 (existential faith). For Davenport, the (fuzzy) borderline between moral imputability and non-imputability is unity-1. Insofar as the Kierkegaardian aesthete, who fails to become a self, nonetheless has unity-1 (and unity-0, which is a precondition for unity-1), he is morally responsible for this failure to become a self in a fuller sense.<sup>68</sup>

## Minimal vs Narrative Selves

In offering this scalar picture, Rudd in particular is rejecting a distinction operative in much of the literature on narrative identity in recent years, particularly the literature influenced by both phenomenology and cognitive science. This is the distinction between the *narrative* or *autobiographical self* (a self-image or self-conception that is diachronically constituted) and a *core* or *minimal self*, the present locus of consciousness which relates to the diachronically extended narrative self.<sup>69</sup> And in rejecting this distinction, MacIntyrean Kierkegaardians will have to deal with both the phenomenological grounds for asserting the existence of these two kinds of self, and the evidence that Kierkegaard himself operates with something very like this distinction.

The neuroscientist Antonio Damasio distinguishes between *core consciousness*, which 'provides the organism with a sense of self about one moment—now—and about one place—here,' and *extended consciousness* which 'provides the organism with an elaborate sense of self—an identity and a person, you or me, no less—and places that person at a point in individual historical time, richly aware of the lived past and of the anticipated future, and keenly cognizant of the world beside it'.<sup>70</sup> Core consciousness arises with each distinct 'pulse' of consciousness and is therefore confined to the present moment; accordingly, the *core self*, the entity that core consciousness senses itself to be, is only 'a transient entity, ceaselessly re-created for each and every object with which the brain interacts'.<sup>71</sup> Extended consciousness, by contrast, brings the past and future into view in the present moment and so gives rise to a temporally extended *autobiographical self*.<sup>72</sup> Like the self endorsed by narrativists, this autobiographical self contains a sense of diachronic extension, while both responding to and re-evaluating the past and evolving in response to its

<sup>66</sup> Evans 2006, pp.267–8, 270.

<sup>67</sup> Davenport 2012, p.46.

<sup>68</sup> Davenport 2012, p.47.

<sup>69</sup> Gallagher 2000; Zahavi 2007; Strawson 2011c; Dainton 2008, pp.49–51.

<sup>70</sup> Damasio 2000, p.16.

<sup>71</sup> Damasio 2000, pp.16–17.

<sup>72</sup> Damasio 2000, p.17.

anticipated future.<sup>73</sup> The core and autobiographical selves are strongly, indeed ‘architecturally’ connected,<sup>74</sup> yet remain distinguishable, not least by virtue of their asymmetrical relationship of dependency: impairments in extended consciousness, such as severe anterograde amnesia, can leave core consciousness unscathed, whereas the destruction of the core self entails the destruction of the autobiographical self as well.<sup>75</sup> And mirroring the claim made by some narrativists that we are somehow anthropologically geared to seek unity and coherence, Damasio claims that evolutionary pressures have led to a situation where the core and autobiographical selves interact to ensure the unity of the subject: ‘more than one self per organism is not a good recipe for survival’.<sup>76</sup>

Dan Zahavi claims that this distinction between the core/minimal self and the autobiographical/narrative self answers the constitution problem that we noted above, namely, that there must already be *some* sort of self, something with a distinctive first-person perspective, to be able to articulate an identity in narrative terms.<sup>77</sup> Note, however, that the minimal self as presented by Zahavi, Damasio, and (in a different form as we saw in Chapter 4) Strawson, is something more phenomenally robust than a mere linguistic capacity for self-reference. The ability to use the first-person pronoun at all depends upon a pre-linguistic *phenomenal* property of experiencing oneself *as* a self in all moments of consciousness, an ‘invariant dimension of first-personal givenness in the multitude of changing experiences’, a tacit sense that the experience is an experience *for* someone.<sup>78</sup> Zahavi stresses that this is not to suggest that there is some isolated, inner self, like a Cartesian mental substance;<sup>79</sup> first-personal givenness and the sense of self it engenders is a feature of our everyday consciousness, not something we uncover in worldless introspection.

Zahavi argues, compellingly, that any successful account of narrative selfhood will need to presuppose this minimal, core sense of self, the feeling of ‘mineness’, in order to get off the ground at all. It’s worth adding, though, that the notion of a property of phenomenal ‘mineness’ built into consciousness can be traced further back than Husserl—as far back, at least, as Kierkegaard’s unfinished manuscript *Johannes Climacus, or, De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*. As I’ve argued elsewhere,<sup>80</sup> this work’s equation of consciousness with ‘interestedness’ (*interessere*) amounts to positing a phenomenal property of personal involvement in consciousness, a non-thematized sense of self-referentiality built into the very structure of thought. That interestedness is a state to be *achieved*, rather than a given, marks an important point of difference between Kierkegaard and the twentieth-century phenomenological tradition; but if Kierkegaard posits a sense of phenomenal self-referentiality even at the level of basic consciousness, this suggests that his work will contain something like a ‘minimal self’ as currently understood.

<sup>73</sup> Damasio 2000, p.225.

<sup>74</sup> Damasio 2000, p.172.

<sup>75</sup> Damasio 2000, p.17.

<sup>76</sup> Damasio 2000, p.225.

<sup>77</sup> Zahavi 2007, p.191.

<sup>78</sup> Zahavi 2005, p.189.

<sup>79</sup> Zahavi 2005, p.189.

<sup>80</sup> Stokes 2010a.



Moreover, the narrative/minimal self distinction maps onto a gap we've encountered several times throughout this book: a gap between the self experienced as a here-and-now subject, and the person or human being as a temporally extended whole. It's precisely this phenomenal gap that, I've argued, makes possible experiences like episodocity and alienation from one's past and future selves. I've also tried to show that overcoming this gap via phenomenal contemporaneity is a key concern running throughout Kierkegaard's writings.

So: *can* we find something analogous to this contemporary minimal/narrative self distinction in Kierkegaard? I think we can, and further think that this distinction seriously complicates matters for anyone wanting to recruit Kierkegaard to the cause of narrative approaches to personal identity.

## Kierkegaard's Naked Self

As early as his Gilleleje journals of 1835, the twenty-two-year-old Kierkegaard already seems to have discarded the idea of the self as a sort of Cartesian inner substance: for all his assiduous study to that point, 'What did I find? Not my "I," [*ikke mit Jeg*], for that is exactly what I was trying in that way to find (I imagined, if I may say so put it, my soul shut up in a box with a spring lock in front, which the external surroundings would release by pressing the spring)' (KJN 1, 21–2/SKS 17, 27; AA:12). This rejection of the self as some pre-existing entity, something within us that's already there to be *found*, is a recurring theme throughout the authorship: as we've seen, for Kierkegaard, the self, soul, or 'I' is not to be thought of as some sort of persisting substance, nor as an homunculus, but rather something that exists in and through a human being's relationship to itself, the world and (ultimately) towards the ground of its being. The discourse 'To Gain One's Soul in Patience' from 1843 (which appeared the year before *The Concept of Anxiety*, the work in which we first get the idea of the human being as a synthesis of opposed factors) speaks of 'the soul' (*sjel*) as 'the contradiction of the temporal and the eternal' that 'can be possessed only in such a way that it is gained and gained in such a way that it is possessed' (EUD, 163/SKS 5, 163). In other words:

One who comes naked into the world possesses nothing, but the one who comes into the world in the nakedness of his soul does nevertheless possess his soul, that is, as something that is to be gained, does not have it outside himself as something new that is to be possessed. If this were not the case, if the seemingly empty thought or this expression for emptiness—nakedness of soul—were not still in the soul, then it could not be possessed and could not be gained except as the external is possessed, and gained, both of which in the deeper sense are an illusion, for that which is gained can be lost because it was not possessed and that which is possessed can be lost because it was not gained. However, that which safeguards the possession of the soul from being an illusion is precisely the gaining of it, and that which guarantees that the gaining of it is not an illusion is precisely that it is possessed beforehand. (EUD, 163–4/SKS 5, 163)

This rather tortured language of possessing and gaining amounts to this: the human being possesses selfhood from the outset as its telos, as that which it is enjoined to become. What's interesting here too is the notion of the *nakedness of the soul*. The infant comes into the world naked, but the nakedness of its *soul* refers to its human capacity to detach itself from the world and its facticity, a capacity that is the precondition of coming to possess itself, that is, relate to itself in the distinctively self-constituting way. A human being can be 'lost in the life of the world', a state in which 'he possesses the world, that is, he is possessed by it'; but 'in the same moment he is different from the whole world, and he senses a resistance that does not follow the movements of the world's life' (EUD, 165/SKS 5, 164–5). That awareness of being different from the world becomes the precondition for gaining one's soul, that is, becoming a self: 'he must let this resistance become more and more pronounced and in so doing gain his soul, for his soul was this very difference: it was the infinity in the life of the world in its difference from itself' (EUD, 165/SKS 5, 165). We find something similar in the discourse 'Strengthening the Inner Being' from the same year, where a self-reflexive 'concern' (*bekymring*) individuates the self by differentiating the subject from 'everything within him by which he himself belongs to the world and he therein for the world' (EUD, 86/SKS 5, 93).<sup>81</sup> Concern, it seems, strips us bare.

This language of nudity, connected to the human being's ability to transcend its immediacy and thereby acquire selfhood, also occurs in the second part of *Either/Or*. Here, the 'naked self' is again treated as a precondition of attaining selfhood, but the emphasis is placed on how this naked self, having thrown off the world, so to speak, then goes about re-clothing itself in its concretion:

There was a sect of Hussites who thought that in order to become a normal human being one had to go around naked like Adam and Eve in Paradise. In our day we not infrequently encounter people who in the spiritual sense teach the same thing—that one becomes a normal human being by going stark naked, which can be done by taking off one's entire concretion. But this is not the way it is. In the act of despair, the universal human being came forth and now is behind the concretion and emerges through it... Every person, if he so wills, can become a paradigmatic human being, not by brushing off his accidental qualities, but by remaining in them and ennobling them. But he ennoble them by choosing them. (EO, 2:261–2/SKS, 3, 249)

This 'remaining in and ennobling' is the process of self-constitution Davenport describes: the human being takes up a position *from within* regarding the 'accidental qualities' it finds itself *to be*, rather than somehow abstracting itself out of them. And yet elsewhere, such a wholesale separation from the self's concretion is *precisely* what William seems to describe:

<sup>81</sup> For an extended discussion of *bekymring* and its individuating functions, see Chapter 9 of Stokes 2010a.

When the passion of freedom is awakened, it is jealous of itself and by no means allows what belongs to a person and what does not to remain unspecified and confused. Therefore, at the first moment of choice the personality seemingly emerges *as naked as the infant from the mother's womb*; at the next moment it is concrete in itself, and a person can remain at this point only through an arbitrary abstraction. He remains himself, exactly the same that he was before, down to the most insignificant feature, and yet he becomes another, for the choice penetrates everything and changes it. Thus his finite personality is now made infinite in the choice, in which he infinitely chooses himself. (EO, 2:223/SKS 3, 213; emphasis added)

William's emphasis here, clearly, is on the self's coming to possess itself in its facticity, not on any assertion of a bare, featureless 'I' beneath the accidental layers of psychological history and accretion. There's no homunculus hiding in a spring-locked box here, just a human being relating to itself in a process of choosing to be itself in its concretion. Indeed we're earlier told that the 'moment of deliberation' in which the self can be indifferent to what it chooses does not actually exist at all, 'least of all in the abstract sense in which you wish to hold onto it; and the longer one stares at it, the smaller it is' (EO, 2:163/SKS 3, 160). Michelle Kosch reads William as claiming that the moment of choice is not even an introspectible event at all: like Climacus' 'leap', such a moment of transition can only appear as something in the past or yet to come.<sup>82</sup> You can't perceive choice happening; you've either already made a choice or you haven't. Yet in referring to the emergence of the 'naked self' William seems to posit *some* state of transition where the subject has shaken off everything it immediately took itself to be—its social roles, proclivities of character, and disposition—but not yet willed itself back into its concretion. William calls this initial moment of choice 'complete isolation' in which 'in choosing myself, I separate myself from my relations to the whole world, until in this separation I end in an abstract identity' (EO, 2:240/SKS 3, 229).

What William wants to warn against is the danger of trying to *remain* in this state of isolation (the detachment affected by the 'ironist' described in *The Concept of Irony*),<sup>83</sup> completely withdrawn from the world and attaining only an 'abstract' perfection; instead, the self needs to immediately regain its concretion through a 'repentance [which] places the individual in the closest connection and the most intimate relation with an outside world' (EO, 2:241/SKS 3, 230). Looked at from the perspective of this moral urgency, the moment of choice *ought* to be infinitesimally small, for the time spent in a state of deliberative non-commitment is *itself* an object of repentance.<sup>84</sup> The transition to the ethical life requires a final moment of departure from the non-ethical life, but *for ethical reasons* this moment must be minimized as much as possible: stalling there only compounds the subject's guilt.

<sup>82</sup> Kosch 2006, p.213.

<sup>83</sup> On irony as detachment, see e.g. Söderquist 2007; Cross 1998; Kangas 2007a, pp.24–7.

<sup>84</sup> Other pseudonyms make similar claims. Vigilius Haufniensis claims that even the time spent *repenting* of one's sins is itself a 'deficit of action' and therefore a *new* sin (CA, 117–18/SKS 4, 419); see also CUP, 1:526/SKS 7, 478 and SUD, 105/SKS 11, 217.

The seemingly paradoxical notion that the self must understand itself as separable from its history, dispositions, and social relationships, and yet relate to this concretion as *that which it is*, recurs several times in Kierkegaard's work. In *Sickness Unto Death*, a work concerned precisely with how the self relates to itself in its synthetic concretion, we are told that the person of immediacy must distinguish himself from his social context and psychological history if he is to attain selfhood. Here, Anti-Climacus echoes Judge William in tellingly familiar terms: the man of immediacy may, to a certain extent, have 'separated his self from externalities, because he has a dim idea that there may even be something eternal in the self' (SUD, 55/SKS 11, 170), and yet:

He has no consciousness of a self that is won by infinite *abstraction from every externality, this naked abstract self*, which, compared with immediacy's fully dressed self, is the first form of the infinite self and the advancing impetus in the whole process by which a self infinitely becomes responsible for its actual self with all its difficulties and advantages. (SUD 55/SKS 11, 170, my emphasis)

Once again, the 'naked' self appears, a self that is teleologically enjoined to take *responsibility* for the human being that it is, becoming a fully conscious and responsible ethical agent, but which is nonetheless on some level distinguishable from the *human being* it identifies with. The despairing attempt to be *nothing but* this purely negative freedom and to forswear what Davenport calls 'the "own self" which the ethically responsible person chooses to "put on"' will foreclose the possibility of stable ethical identity, for it would make all commitments arbitrarily reversible.<sup>85</sup> Anti-Climacus takes Judge William's admonition against trying to remain in such abstraction and raises it to the level of sin: wanting to be 'the most abstract form, the most abstract possibility of the self' is to sever one's relation to the power that established the self, a defiance as despairing as it is blasphemous (SUD, 68/SKS 11, 182). A self that denies its facticity in this way becomes 'a king without a country, absolutely ruling over nothing; his position, his sovereignty, is subordinate to the dialectic that rebellion is legitimate at any moment' (SUD, 69/SKS 11, 183).

In this form of despair, the self uses its 'infinite form', its capacity to detach and distinguish itself from its environment, history, and psychological make-up to try (and ultimately fail) to create itself *ex nihilo* (SUD, 68/SKS 11, 182). For both Anti-Climacus and Judge William, free human beings have—and in order to become selves *must* have—a way of referring to or thinking about themselves as something distinguishable from their externalities and particulars; but a human being who uses this power to *decline* its concrete history or situation fails to become a self. To take off one's concretion and *leave it off* is to be a complete non-entity (EO, 2:256/SKS 3, 244); instead, truth lies in the 'identity' of the factors of 'isolation' and 'continuity' (EO, 2:262/SKS 3, 249).

<sup>85</sup> Davenport 2001a, p.104.

Fine, Davenport and Rudd might say: all the passages cited above can support a reading whereby the ‘naked self’ is essentially just an abstraction, or perhaps a somewhat poetic way of describing the human capacities for self-reference or spontaneous self-reflection. Conversely, theorists of the minimal/narrative self split, such as Zahavi, have insisted that the minimal self is *not* a mere abstraction, but something figured phenomenologically in our experience.<sup>86</sup> So the question that arises here is this: does this *naked self* that we find in both Judge William and Anti-Climacus, and in a more indirect form in the upbuilding discourses, correspond to the minimal self of contemporary phenomenology? To answer this, I’d like to consider a recent disagreement between Davenport, Rudd, and myself over whether narrative selfhood, such as they take Kierkegaard to endorse, requires a minimal self in order to be intelligible.

## The Four-dimensional Problem

A problem for narrative approaches, particularly those that take narrative identity to aim at the intelligibility of a *whole* life, is the apparent bifurcation of the self as a narrative totality and the self as a present, conscious agent.<sup>87</sup> It’s just this bifurcation, and how we overcome it, that we’ve been discussing throughout this book: the gap between the remembering and remembered self, between me\* and my past and future person-stages, between the self I take myself to be now and the human being I’ve been in the past and will become in the future. But it’s a bifurcation that narrative theorists haven’t always taken seriously (Schechtman is a major exception to this, as we’ve seen) or have actively rejected. Consider this from Rudd:

When I ask whether ‘particular aspects of [my] life hang together’ I can’t help but do so against some (more or less explicit) sense of what my ‘life as a whole’ is; after all, it is the whole of me that will be, say, moving to America or getting married, not just an aspect of my life!<sup>88</sup>

But if my self is a temporally extended, narratively constituted being, this won’t be quite right: my entire narrative is not moving to America. Rather, a portion of my narrative—maybe a short one, maybe one that extends right to the end—will now take place in America (we might then ask whether my moving to America makes good sense, or specifically *narrative* sense, in the context of my life). My narrative doesn’t change location in the way my body does; we can ask where a person is now, but not where his narrative is now.

We look like running afoul of something analogous to a standard objection to four-dimensionalist accounts of personal identity. Four-dimensionalists claim that while ‘person-stages’ may be said to exist at any one time, a *person* only exists *across*

<sup>86</sup> Zahavi 2005, p.130.

<sup>87</sup> For a much fuller version of the problem outlined in this section, see Stokes 2012.

<sup>88</sup> Rudd 2007, p.544.

time as an aggregate of person-stages.<sup>89</sup> But as Schechtman notes, whatever we could point to as a 'person-stage' will be a talking, rational, self-referring agent with at least some degree of temporal duration; in short, on any reasonable construal of the properties that a *person* has, person-stages will themselves count as persons—which means we explain the identity conditions of *one* person at the cost of positing a second person occupying the same space.<sup>90</sup> And a similar fissure opens up in the moving-to-America example: in the declaration 'I am moving to America tomorrow' the referent of 'I' is distinct from the narratively structured lifespan that includes time in America. The self-as-narrator and the self-as-narratively-conditioned-diachronic-person have here come apart.<sup>91</sup>

Narrativists have been at pains to repudiate any sort of Cartesian picture of the self as a 'bare locus' of experience, precisely because it is hard to see how such a bare locus could support the things we apparently care about in personal identity. What we *care* about in, for example, survival is, they argue, no featureless token of identity but 'a distinct personality with his or her own unique character, history, way of being'.<sup>92</sup> Rudd concedes that this rich, narratively expressed self is distinguishable from 'a mere first-person perspective' which, though a necessary condition for having a self, can, in cases such as brain damage, detach from the self as narrative entity.<sup>93</sup> Yet he also repudiates the idea of the minimal self as something *separate* from the narrative self; he takes it 'A Self is not a bare I plus some extra ingredient; a bare I is a drastically diminished Self',<sup>94</sup> and 'in normal cases, the narrative self is as basic as it gets... There is no more basic level of selfhood at which experiences are had before being interpreted in narrative terms'.<sup>95</sup> Even if there are valid reasons to sometimes talk about the core or minimal self, this should not mislead us into reifying this concept as if it 'exists as an actual entity alongside or underneath the developed narrative self. Each of us has—or, better, *is*—just one self'.<sup>96</sup> Davenport likewise accepts that 'A Kierkegaardian can still allow a *formal* distinction between the present operations of a person's consciousness and agency and their full practical identity, while holding that this is not a *real* distinction between entities'.<sup>97</sup>

Both Davenport and Rudd want to reject the idea that there is any ontologically serious split between the self-as-subject and the self-as-object. For Davenport, it is the person *qua* narrative that identifies with or repudiates itself from the perspective of its present state: 'The present agent, we might say, is the dynamic living face of a narrative identity moving into the future'.<sup>98</sup> Rudd accepts that 'we do think of

<sup>89</sup> Lewis 1983. <sup>90</sup> Schechtman 1996, pp.56–60.

<sup>91</sup> Note that this rather inelegant phrasing gets around one of the rejoinders Rudd has offered to this argument: that I wrongly impute to him the view that selves *are* narratives rather than the subject of narratives. Rudd 2012, p.191.

<sup>92</sup> Rudd 2005, p.416.

<sup>93</sup> Rudd 2005, p.421; see also Rudd 2012, p.195.

<sup>94</sup> Rudd 2005, p.421.

<sup>95</sup> Rudd 2012, p.196.

<sup>96</sup> Rudd 2012, p.222.

<sup>97</sup> Davenport 2012, p.154, my emphasis.

<sup>98</sup> Davenport 2012, p.154.

ourselves (our selves) as both wholly present, *and* as spread out over time’,<sup>99</sup> but that these are simply two, sometimes divergent or opposed, ways in which a *single* self can look at itself. For both Davenport and Rudd, each of us is ultimately not a minimal self that relates to a narrative self, but rather just *a self* that relates to itself in a narratively qualified way.

Yet the minimal/narrative self split needn’t be thought of in the decidedly metaphysical way that both Davenport and Rudd seem to understand it. Rather we might say that identity or non-identity with my past and future person-stages is an experiential reality, *whatever* metaphysical stories we want to tell about the identity and persistence conditions of selves. What we see in the various splits we’ve seen in this book up to this point—between me/me\*, the self I am now, and the person I recall being in the past and anticipate becoming in the future, the experience of identity or non-identity with the notional subject of remembered or imagined scenarios, and so forth—is a phenomenal experience of being a self that must relate itself to past and future selves in a way that identifies or fails to identify with these on an affective level. And this experience contains a sense of being wholly present now, rather than being only part of a temporally extended whole. We experience ourselves, as William James put it, as being ‘as fully present at any moment of consciousness in which it is present, as in a whole lifetime of such moments’.<sup>100</sup> That doesn’t mean we don’t *also* experience ourselves as diachronically extended in the way that Strawson’s Diachronics do. But we nonetheless do, I’d suggest, have a sense of being a unified, wholly present subject, of *being all here now*. Our past person-stages then become an *object* for that subject, an object with which we are to identify or repudiate.

As this is a point about phenomenology rather than metaphysics—or better, about the metaphysics *figured in* our phenomenal experience of ourselves<sup>101</sup>—I think Davenport’s adoption of a ‘leading edge’ metaphysics of time to get around the four-dimensionalism objection is probably overkill. He takes Trenton Merricks and myself to be implicitly committed to either presentism (the view that only the present moment is ontologically real) or eternalism (the view that all moments in time are equally real)<sup>102</sup> and argues that ‘existential narrative realists’ should instead subscribe to the view that the past is real and the present moment is the ‘leading edge’ from which the past is, so to speak, being generated.<sup>103</sup> But in fact my four-dimensionalism objection is, at least in the context of our discussion of Kierkegaard, essentially indifferent to the metaphysics of time. I can relate in an appropriative way to my past and future selves even if presentism is true and the past and future are not ultimately real.

Similarly, Rudd worries about ‘a danger of ontological inflation that Stokes’ terminology threatens’,<sup>104</sup> even while accepting some of the phenomenology:

<sup>99</sup> Rudd 2012, p.191.

<sup>100</sup> James 1950, p.299.

<sup>101</sup> On the idea of metaphysical claims built into self-experience, see Stokes 2013b.

<sup>102</sup> Davenport 2012, p.154.

<sup>103</sup> Davenport 2012, p.154.

<sup>104</sup> Rudd 2012, p.226.

What it comes down to is that at any moment I can see myself—the whole of me—as now bearing responsibility for who I am. There is this ‘vertical’ element. But this ‘naked,’ present-tense self is not an entity distinct from the narrative self. (Stokes says it both is and transcends the narrative self). I agree that I have the capacity to step back from and take responsibility for what I have been, but this can be accommodated within the understanding of the self as the protagonist of its narrative or, to recall Davenport’s image, the ‘leading edge’ of its narrative . . . There is not one ‘narrative’ self that leads a temporal existence and another ‘naked’ one that lives in an ‘eternal now.’ There is just the one self—me (or you)—who has done all *these* things, who is trying to do all *those* things, and who may be conscious of standing at each moment in the light of eternity. That I can think of myself in this intense present tense way is certainly important, but this does *not* show that the minimal self is more than an abstraction.<sup>105</sup>

Rudd thinks that I mistakenly conflate the self, the protagonist *of* a narrative, with the narrative itself, which ‘leaves [Stokes] having awkwardly to postulate two selves, which are then said to both be and not be identical with one another’.<sup>106</sup> Hence my account of the narrative self ends up metaphysically over-populated. Despite this ontological worry, Rudd nonetheless insists that the unity of the present-tense self and diachronic narrative self is a phenomenological rather than metaphysical point.<sup>107</sup> He tells us that *his* self-experience is robustly diachronic: he experiences himself as a being who was in the past and will be in the future, not merely as a transient self of the sort Strawson and Damasio posit.<sup>108</sup>

Two things, however, need to be said here. The first is that neither Damasio nor Strawson claim that the transient selves they assert to exist *must* lack a sense of diachronic extension. Rudd claims that insofar as Zahavi ascribes an Husserlian structure of temporal experience to his ‘minimal’ selves, these can’t be the same thing as Damasio’s ‘core’ self. For Zahavi, following Husserl, every moment of experience contains, in addition to a primary impression of the present moment, both a retention of the previous moment and a protention of the moment to follow. Rudd seems to think this must be impossible for core selves, living as they do in each individual ‘pulse’ of consciousness. But presumably a ‘pulse’ of consciousness could—like any moment of consciousness according to Husserl<sup>109</sup>—contain both a retention of the past and a protention of the future. So it’s not clear that a radically transient self such as Damasio and Strawson take to exist would necessarily lack a sense of having existed in the past and of projecting into the future. And in any case, as I’ve argued here, the point I’m making is best understood as a from-the-inside description of self-experience rather than a point about the ‘objective’ duration of minimal selves.

Secondly, as we saw in Chapter 5, Rudd doesn’t take the phenomenology of alienation from past and future person-stages particularly seriously, viewing the experiences of non-identity the Serious Matron and Young Russian describe as

<sup>105</sup> Rudd 2012, p.226.

<sup>106</sup> Rudd 2012, p.227.

<sup>107</sup> Rudd 2012, p.196.

<sup>108</sup> Rudd 2012, p.198.

<sup>109</sup> The *locus classicus* is Husserl 1991.



merely metaphorical. If, like Rudd, we don't regard such experiences of temporal alienation as being real experiences of profound *disidentification* with our remembered past and anticipated future, the gap between self and person, or minimal self and narrative self, loses salience. Rudd thinks of these reports of non-identity as simple hyperbole. What I've suggested here is that they rather point to a profound gap between the self I experience myself as being right now and the past and future I imaginatively encounter, a gap that must be *overcome*. The phenomenal experience of self-identity across time is, in short, much more of an *achievement* than Rudd implicitly allows.

Davenport makes a further, related objection to my view: as the narrative self includes character traits (i.e. dispositions that must be diachronic given that we only express them episodically) and as our choices and actions express these character traits, then 'if character traits are real phenomena rather than a convenient fiction, then the Stokes/Zahavi bifurcation cannot go "all the way down".'<sup>110</sup> (This is related to the live problem of what Strawson calls the 'ontic depth' of minimal selves.)<sup>111</sup> A minimal self, on this view, could not express a diachronically and narratively qualified trait like resentment or friendship, for these are features of a narratively extended self. On this basis, and citing Stanley Hauweras on character, Davenport concludes that 'the presently choosing agent is never the "naked self" that Stokes finds in some of the writings of Kierkegaard's pseudonym Judge William—a self momentarily standing outside all its acquired dispositions'.<sup>112</sup> But again, if the naked self is understood as a *phenomenal* datum rather than a metaphysical entity, I don't think this is in fact a problem: I experience myself as a wholly present subject, here-and-now, whose actions express character traits that were formed by the past actions of the human being I now am. I can't somehow step *outside* my character, but I can make my character, and the history that has formed it, into an object for myself and take up a position on it. Of course my character will still be *transparently* operative in the way in which I take up such a position on my character: if I am, say, someone who is easily embarrassed, then I may make my embarrassment an object of my evaluation and may find myself *embarrassed by* how easily embarrassed I am. In that way I am both expressing my character trait while simultaneously experiencing that trait as something separable from what I am, something I can identify or disidentify with.

Hence I think Davenport is too quick to dismiss the Sartrean point, made by Lippitt following Mulhall, that 'because the self as object of reflective consciousness does not coincide with the subject doing the reflecting, any narrative it can "tell" about itself will fail to include this very act of narration'.<sup>113</sup> Davenport thinks this is no threat to the narrative view because such a threat requires the (erroneous) assumption that a narrative identity must be entirely the result of reflection and articulation; in his view, most of the content of our narrative self-understanding is

<sup>110</sup> Davenport 2012, p.30.

<sup>111</sup> Strawson 2009, pp.330–1; cf. Johnston 2010, p.71.

<sup>112</sup> Davenport 2012, p.34.

<sup>113</sup> Davenport 2012, p.34.

more implicit than this. But the Sartrean point has another kind of significance too: the very fact that I can make myself an object to myself opens up the possibility of experiencing a sense of identity or non-identity with that object. The sense of being a present subject, a minimal or naked self, is thus the experience of being *more than* or *beyond* the concrete human being that I am. I say ‘experience’ because this is not simply something we discover reflectively, but in the experiences of affective identification, alienation, and ownership that we’ve been discussing.

Hence, I don’t think that imputing something like a narrative/minimal self distinction to Kierkegaard runs a risk of needless over-ontologization. In fact, I think such a conception, understood as a subjective dimension of experience rather than a feature of any metaphysical theory, helps to make sense of Kierkegaard’s talk of a ‘naked self’ as well as cohering with the affective gap between self and person, or present subject and diachronically extended human being, that we’ve seen haunts both Kierkegaard’s work and contemporary discussions of self-experience. In Chapter 8, I will hopefully make this point clearer, by pointing to the specifically eschatological dimensions of this ‘naked self’ and the experience of time it engenders.

## 8

# Survival and Eschatology

### Identity and the Survival Problem

In Chapter 7, I argued that when Kierkegaard's pseudonyms speak somewhat obliquely of a 'naked self', this is not to be understood as mere abstraction, nor simply a poetic way of describing our capacities for reflection and self-reference, but as a real phenomenal datum, a part of lived experience. One helpful way to explicate this experiential reality of the 'naked self' in both *Either/Or* and *The Sickness Unto Death* is, perhaps surprisingly, to consider how each work approaches the issue of posthumous survival. The question of how the same person can exist successively in earthly existence and an afterlife is the historical wellspring of personal identity theory itself, from the Patristics down to Locke, and continues to pop up in both personal identity discussions and philosophy of religion.<sup>1</sup> Even for writers who reject the notion of an afterlife, the thought-experiment provided by posthumous existence can help us get clarity about what we care about in survival: working out what would have to be the case for posthumous existence to count as survival can help us get clearer about the nature of survival in less dramatic circumstances as well.

One way into this topic is to begin with Kierkegaard's discussion of the desire, which most of us have probably experienced at some point, to *become someone else*. As the language suggests, this is precisely a problem about personal identity, and both Judge William and Anti-Climacus discuss it in those terms. Both pseudonyms diagnose an apparent incoherence at the heart of such a desire: someone who wishes they could acquire the history, properties, and projects of some other person nonetheless imagines that doing so would somehow leave their identity intact. William tells us that one who forms the desire to be completely changed in all his particulars 'is nevertheless continually of the opinion that he would be himself even if everything were changed' and that 'there is something within him that in relation to everything else is absolute, something whereby he is who he is even if the change he achieved by his wish were the greatest possible' (EO, 2:214/SKS 3, 206). He imagines the future scenario as if it would still be *him* in the future, albeit in radically altered life circumstances, and perhaps even with a totally different personality. This certainly

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Perry 1978; Hick 1976, pp.278–95; Audi 1976; Mavrodes 1977; Quinn 1978; Inwagen 1978; Baker 2007; Buckareff and Wagenen 2010.

sounds suspiciously like a substantialist picture in which a featureless but identity-preserving Cartesian ego passes from one factual set to another—and as we've seen, even by this early stage Kierkegaard has long since rejected ego-substantialism.

Judge William is adamant that the person who wants to be someone else is mistaken in thinking 'he could be changed continually and yet remain the same, as if his innermost being were an algebraic symbol that could signify anything whatever it is assumed to be' (EO, 2:215/SKS 3, 206). The subject cannot surrender her entire concretion and still be herself, because the only way to be herself is to choose herself *in that concretion*. Anti-Climacus deploys the same thought-experiment, this time directed against the 'man of immediacy' who understands himself as nothing more than the totality of his social identity:

The man of immediacy does not know himself, he quite literally identifies himself only by the clothes he wears, he identifies having a self by externalities... So when the externals have completely changed for the person of immediacy and he has despaired, he goes one step further; he thinks something like this, it becomes his wish: What if I became someone else, got myself a new self. Well, what if he did become someone else? I wonder whether he would recognize himself. (SUD, 53/SKS 11, 169)

For 'practical' approaches to the question of personal identity, the claim that someone who only knows herself as the externalities that constitute her social identity wouldn't be able to recognize herself if those externalities changed completely actually sounds pretty reasonable. If I try to envision a version of myself deprived of my body, personality, name, job, and set of social relations, what's left to enable me to see *that* person as being continuous with *me* in any satisfying respect? Absent a Cartesian ego, we seem drawn to the Parfitian reductionist conclusion that there is no 'further fact' about identity underlying these factors.

So it's fortunate, then, that according to Anti-Climacus such 'ludicrous' things as becoming someone else never happen. But just two pages later, we find this:

The question of immortality has often occupied him, and more than once he has asked the pastor whether there is such an immortality, whether one would actually recognize himself again—something that certainly must be of very particular interest to him, since he has no self. (SUD, 56/SKS 11, 171)

A person composed of nothing but his social relations and qualifications simply would not exist if he passed into an afterlife in which those relationships no longer held; there is nothing that could pass into the afterlife and *still be him*. And as we'll see, Kierkegaard's references to the afterlife emphasize just such a radical discontinuity between this life and the next. And yet Anti-Climacus is not suggesting the 'man of immediacy' will somehow evade posthumous judgement. Rather, the immediate person's 'ludicrous mistake' was just to assume that social relationships and designations were exhaustive of what he is, for 'a self is indeed infinitely distinct from an externality' (SUD, 53/SKS 11, 169). The question is what this 'infinitely distinct' self might be: if ego-substantialism is off the table, and if the self has been stripped of

all its external determinants, what *could* there be of oneself to recognize in some posthumous existence, or to sustain existence from this world to a resurrection world?

This question of post-mortem survival would also seem to present a problem for any narrativist who wants to preserve the idea of posthumous existence—and that includes Kierkegaard, if, as narrativists like Rudd and Davenport claim, Kierkegaard is one of their number. For Kierkegaard, a human being becomes a self by ‘relating to itself’ in a particular way. But as Adorno puts it in his critical engagement with Kierkegaard, ‘No theology has ever conceived the idea of hope for a “relation”, or for the indeterminate substratum of the relation, but solely as hope for the mortal creature’.<sup>2</sup> What self-constituting narrative relationship could hold between a living human being and a self that exists in some *radically* different post-mortem or post-resurrection world? How could a narratively constituted self persist after biological death? How could we now regard *that* future posthumous self as being narratively connected to us? These aren’t meant to be fatal objections, but they are questions that a narrativist would need to answer if they wanted posthumous existence and narrative identity to be compossible. Of course, if we just accept that there *is* no posthumous existence, then the problem disappears entirely, or becomes purely hypothetical. For Kierkegaard, however, immortality is essential and non-negotiable, concerned as he is, as Tamara Monet Marks has argued, to show his reader just what’s at stake in believing orthodox Christian doctrines such as bodily resurrection.<sup>3</sup> So any reading of Kierkegaard that takes Kierkegaard himself to be internally consistent has to explain how his account of selfhood is compatible with his eschatological views. And as I will explain in Chapter 9, those of us who reject the idea of posthumous consciousness can still find something very important in Kierkegaard’s discussions of immortality.

In a sense this ‘survival problem’ is related to, though importantly different from, the broader ‘mortality problem’ that besets narrative approaches to identity: if what *I am* is something constituted by a narrative, and narratives depend on their endings in order to give them the narrative shape and meaning they have, then what *I ultimately am* is unknowable to me.<sup>4</sup> In literary narratives, the timing of any given death is determined by the logic of the narrative structure; what the death *means* and *when* it happens mutually determine each other. As Peter Goldie notes, when we talk about the ‘beginning’, ‘middle’, and ‘end’ of a narrative (including the narrative of a whole life, even though Goldie rejects that level of generality) ‘these are *already* narrativised notions: there is already something “fitting” about them in the narrative’.<sup>5</sup> But while Pascal lamented that ‘the last act is bloody, however fine the rest of the play’,<sup>6</sup> death doesn’t always arrive according to a neat five-act structure. Death, notes Kierkegaard, is ‘a denouement, and then it is over, one is buried’ (WL, 252/SKS 9, 251), but he also

<sup>2</sup> Adorno 1989, p.82.

<sup>3</sup> Marks 2010, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> I discuss this problem in Stokes 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Goldie 2012, p.165.

<sup>6</sup> Pascal 1995, p.53.

notes that many lives 'go on until death comes and puts an end to life, yet without, in the sense of a conclusion, bringing the end with it' (BA, 7/SKS 15, 93). Johannes Climacus imagines responding to a party invite with the profound jest: 'I will come, definitely, believe me, except in case a roof tile falls down and kills me, because then I cannot come' (CUP, 1:88/SKS 7, 87)—a stunning example of both the 'certain-uncertainty' of death (TDIO, 91/SKS 5, 460), that is, its radical contingency with respect to timing, and the way in which it can intervene suddenly in a life in a way that seems to make a mockery of our desire to understand that life as a coherent narrative.

For narrativists, the meaning of a given life-experience or event is determined by its place in a larger weave of narratively structured events and meanings. My sitting down to write these words is an event in the larger narrative of writing a chapter, writing a book, being a philosopher, and so forth. If, as MacIntyrean narrativists do, we want to talk about a *final* level of narrative intelligibility that encompasses a *whole* life, then events up to and including death<sup>7</sup> will determine the meaning and significance of those events. But given that the events of my future, including how and when I will die, are necessarily unknown to me, then the *ultimate* meanings of my life-events may turn out to be radically different to what I take them to be.

Davenport offers two main lines of response to this mortality objection, the second of which also bears on the survival problem. The first is that it is exaggerated: many people *do* have 'well-justified beliefs that they will probably die soon (even within some specified time period)'<sup>8</sup> and can use the little time left in ways that cement the narrative meaning of their lives. The second—and arguably more successful—response is that, even acknowledging the radical contingency of death, we can live in such a narratively and volitionally unified way that not even sudden death can alter the meaning of our lives. Davenport's MacIntyre-inflected reading of Kierkegaardian teleology employs fundamentally Aristotelian terms, noting the sense in which Kierkegaard also shares with Augustine and Aquinas a belief that 'virtues are qualities of character connected to the attainment of beatitude as the final end and highest good of human life'.<sup>9</sup> The very contingency of death should focus us upon the possibility that our lives might suddenly be cut short *without* this telos being reached. In that sense, the idea of a final judgement might amount to the merely heuristic thought of a point in time at which there will no longer be any prospect of attaining such a state of virtue, as Davenport has recently argued: at death, our life acquires 'an objective significance that no longer changes, that is eternal . . . at death, our practical identity *is* eternally what it has become: our leeway-liberty ends and our character is

<sup>7</sup> And possibly even beyond: for example, the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge is a crucial episode for how we understand and evaluate the life of its creator, John Roebling, even though Roebling didn't live to see it completed.

<sup>8</sup> Davenport 2012, p.158.

<sup>9</sup> Davenport 2001b, p.273.

*forever fixed*.<sup>10</sup> We die, a life is completed, and the capacity to change our despairing self-relation disappears.<sup>11</sup>

This form of concern, however, is quite a long way from the traditional picture of personal posthumous survival, which seems to require a self that is more than just the sum of its virtues, something that transcends the narrative of earthly life and can be present both here and in the posited resurrection world. *Something* needs to survive between this world and the next. Following the infusion of Platonic substantialism into Christianity, an immaterial, immortal soul came to be seen as the vehicle of this transcendence. After Locke, as we've seen, that sort of substantialist claim became unavailable. Yet it's telling that despite their rejection of substantialism, both Anti-Climacus and Judge William seem to equate the 'naked self' that sees itself as radically distinct from its history and externalities with this transworld bearer of eschatological judgement. William continually argues that this naked self, a self that can transcend and take a position upon the diachronic human being that it relates to, is the basis upon which we can choose ourselves in our 'eternal validity' (e.g. EO, 2:211/SKS 3, 203). Anti-Climacus, too, frequently describes the self's coming to see itself as distinct from its environment and brute facts about its personality as its becoming aware of 'something eternal' within it. The 'naked self' then, seems inherently bound up with notions of eternity and, by extension, eschatology. Yet if Kierkegaard is—rightly—read as a non-substantialist, what is this 'something eternal' that is the subject of personal immortality and eternal judgement? When we are told that the man of immediacy has forgotten 'his name, divinely understood' (SUD, 33–4/SKS 11, 149), what are we to understand as the referent of such a name?

## Death and the Divided Self

Both the survival and mortality problems point, I'd suggest, towards the very split that we've been discussing throughout this work: a split between the self understood as the present locus of experience and the diachronically extended person. This is not surprising, for as Mark Johnston has very convincingly argued, this split is reflected in our concerned attitudes towards death itself.<sup>12</sup> Say I see a notation on today's calendar that says 'PS dentist appointment 1:30pm', I might feel pity for PS that he has to go to the dentist. I may think something like this: 'That poor guy. I mean, I hate going to *my* dentist; there's always some pain, and a hefty bill, and a lecture about flossing, and—wait a minute, those are *my* initials! *I'm* PS! Oh no, *I'm* going to the dentist today!' This (admittedly quite artificial) train of thought, with its sudden shift from other-regarding pity to egocentric fear, seems to turn on the realization of some further fact. But what *new* fact is introduced by this '*I am PS*' that isn't

<sup>10</sup> Davenport 2011, pp.170–1.

<sup>11</sup> Davenport 2012, p.156.

<sup>12</sup> See also Fischer 2009, p.70 for a discussion of the role 'thin' and 'thick' selves play in the related question of who is *harmed* by death.

contained in the thought that 'PS is PS'?<sup>13</sup> How does knowing that it's *me* that is going to the dentist change things?

As we saw in Chapter 5, according to Johannes Climacus the earnest thought that *I* will die and the thought that a sort of 'I-in-general' will die are importantly different in just this sort of way. Likewise, for Strawson, there's something different in the thought that GS did this terrible thing and that I\* did this terrible thing. For Johnston, this difference is figured in the gap between *person*-identity and *self*-identity, and fearing the death of the *person* is correspondingly different to fearing the death of the *self*. 'Person' refers to a human being who exists across time and has certain properties, relationships, projects, and so forth. In fearing death, I may fear that there will no longer be a person called PS, who looks like me, looks after my kids, writes my books and papers, teaches my students, and indirectly pays off my dentist's mortgage. There will be no person doing what I do in the world, and insofar as I believe the things I do are worth doing, that is *prima facie* a bad thing and its prospect worth fearing. But this isn't all we fear when we fear death. Our more fundamental fear is our loss of *self*, the thought that this subjective 'arena of presence' as Johnston puts it will no longer exist. It's not just that I fear there won't be a person in the world who answers to my description; I fear, more basically, the extinguishment of the subject figured in my perspectival experience of the world. Experiences like this show what I take to be *myself* as distinguishable from my *person*, and that I can care about them in different ways.

Johnston is, I think, right that 'Self identity, the identity that guarantees the continuation of one's immediately available arena of presence over time, is more basic in its importance than personal identity, the identity over time of the public person who happens now to be at the centre of one's arena of presence'.<sup>14</sup> But he also thinks there *are* no selves in this fundamental sense: 'The putative substance sortal "arena of presence and action", like "consciousness" or "self", is a *busted* substance sortal; busted, I take it, by the empirical fact that there are no mental substances.'<sup>15</sup> There are *persons* (and we can and do care about the survival of persons), but the *self* that appears to be at the centre of my perspectively ordered experiences is only 'virtual or *apparent*'.<sup>16</sup> In Chapter 3 we saw a distinction between 'notional' and 'actual' subjects of memory and anticipation. In Johnston's picture, *all* subjects are merely notional ('merely intentional' in Johnston's terms) and so not 'objective'. And, Johnston adds, as 'the identity of merely intentional objects is not an objective matter' it is 'not an important matter' either.<sup>17</sup> In a world without souls or immaterial substances—the world that we, and Kierkegaard, inhabit—there can be no ontologically respectable selves worth worrying about. Hence the answer to the question 'what is this "something eternal" that is the subject of personal immortality and eternal judgement?' can only be: nothing at all.

<sup>13</sup> Johnston 2010, pp.146–8.

<sup>16</sup> Johnston 2010, p.164.

<sup>14</sup> Johnston 2010, p.163.

<sup>17</sup> Johnston 2010, p.165.

<sup>15</sup> Johnston 2010, p.175.



Johnston goes on to outline a way in which, in his view, we can achieve a kind of survival by identifying with the persons who will live on after our death. Insofar, however, as I here want to explore what Kierkegaard can (and cannot) show us about personal identity, I want to linger for a moment with the implications of Johnston's view for Kierkegaard's account. If Johnston is right, then in appealing to a 'naked self' that experiences itself as something over-against the diachronically extended *person*, Kierkegaard's pseudonyms get the person/self distinction right but then wrongly reify the self. If the self is not an immaterial substance then, in Johnston's view, it can have *no* real ontological significance, and the Kierkegaardian subject is wrong to place such soteriological weight upon it. Yet I think Johnston has here made the same problematic move that Strawson makes: getting the phenomenology of the present-tense self correct but then trying to turn that phenomenology into an 'objective' metaphysical account of the diachronic existence of such selves. With Strawson, this metaphysical move leaves us with an unimaginably large number of infinitesimally short-lived selves, while for Johnston the self simply can't have diachronic extension at all, because 'arenas of presence' don't admit of re-identification; speaking of such selves 'can only provide for ways of picking ourselves out *at a time* and not *over time*'.<sup>18</sup>

Common to both these approaches is an assumption that persons and selves (or human beings and selves, PS and me\*, narrative and minimal selves etc.) must be analysed with reference to a single temporal frame. Say that an average Strawsonian self lasts a single second; we could then say that the lifespan of a human who lives 70 years contains about 2.2 billion selves. But as we saw in Chapter 6, Kierkegaard's work resists this sort of move, which is akin to the category mistake of introducing temporal categories into the eternal (EO, 1:41/SKS 3, 48). It insists on seeing the self as an irreducibly *present-tense* matter. To be a self is to relate *here and now* to the past and the future of the person/human being you are in a particular, appropriative way. In other words, what Kierkegaard draws our attention to here, in explicating the self/person split and how it operates in the context of contemporary discussions of identity, is the way in which each of these elements has its own distinct temporality, and that these temporalities are not to be conflated or folded into a single temporal schema. We must not, in other words, turn the *present* of the self into the discrete moment in the life of a human being to which it corresponds.

That in turn means that the survival problem takes on quite a different complexion: posthumous survival is a problem *about persons*, but is a problem *for selves*, whose temporality is quite different to that of the diachronic persons they relate to. If narrativists want to recruit Kierkegaard to their ranks, without either denying that Kierkegaard does take soteriology seriously or imputing some sort of deep incoherence to his view, they will therefore need to accept that Kierkegaard's concern for

<sup>18</sup> Johnston 2010, p.169.

salvation means identity cannot *just* be narrative for Kierkegaard. The narrative, diachronic person must also be supplemented by a naked self that appropriates the person to itself even as it knows itself to transcend that person. Essential to this naked self is its present-tense character—and as we'll see shortly, for Kierkegaard, the *present* of this present-tense self is not merely *a* moment, but *the moment* (*Øjeblikket*): the place where time meets eternity.

## Naked Self and Eternity

At this point we need to take note of the divergent understandings of eternity that characterize *Either/Or* and *The Sickness Unto Death*, and their correspondingly different understandings of the temporality of selfhood. Part of the reason Judge William's description of selfhood appeals so much to narrativist Kierkegaardians is that his self is explicitly temporally extended in a historically developmental fashion, one in which the self-constituting moment of repentance itself becomes a moment *in* that history:

The self he chooses has a boundless multiplicity within itself inasmuch as it has a history, a history in which he acknowledges identity with himself. This history is of a different kind, for in this history he stands in relation to other individuals in the race and to the whole race, and this history contains painful things, and yet he is the person he is only through this history. (EO, 2:216/SKS 3, 207)

At the moment of self-constituting choice, the self does not construct itself *ex nihilo*, but instead binds itself to its past and to the human race from which it arises (EO, 2:239/SKS 3, 228); the subject 'repents himself back into himself, back into the family, back into the race, until he finds himself in God' (EO, 2:216/SKS 3, 207). On this picture, self-constitution through repentance is the acquiring of a qualitatively new, ethically charged form of continuity with my past and future. I take ownership and responsibility for both my personal past and the communal past in which I am embedded.<sup>19</sup> Thus William's self has a robustly in-the-world quality about it; the seemingly worldless naked self exists for just a moment before re-immersing itself (but with a new form of self-consciousness and volitional coherence) into the flow of concrete social life.

William still uses the language of traditional Christian soteriology; for instance, the self-constituting choice of myself in my 'absolute validity' (EO, 2:219/SKS 3, 209) amounts to discovering 'my soul' or 'innermost being' (EO, 2:221/SKS 3, 211). But what's interesting about the way William uses such apparently religiously-freighted terms as 'soul', 'judgement', and 'eternity' is that he does so in ways that seem to denude them of their eschatological meanings. The admonition *respice finem*, 'think of the end', offered to one whose moral well-being we are concerned for, is for

<sup>19</sup> Lillegard 2001, p.223.

William no *memento mori* but rather a *carpe diem* that has nothing deathly about it: 'the word *finis* does not mean death, because even that is not a human being's most difficult task, but life, that there comes a moment when in reality the thing to do is to begin to live'; here our concern for our friend's soul is that he will end up 'a defective specimen of a human being instead' in *this* life (EO, 2:327/SKS 3, 308–9).

William is keen to make his younger aesthetic friend aware that time is running out, but then proposes that through self-constituting choice (such as the commitment to marriage), the self can attain an 'eternity' *within* life. Thus the married man has fought 'the most dangerous enemy, which is time' but has 'not killed time but has rescued and preserved it in eternity', and so 'solve[d] the great riddle, to live in eternity and yet to hear the cabinet clock strike in such a way that its striking does not shorten but lengthens his eternity' (EO 2:138/SKS 3, 137). The 'continuity' attained in marriage gives love an inner 'eternity' that shields it from the corrosive effects of time. But *this* eternity, measured out by the hall clock's chime and successive wedding anniversaries, doesn't seem to amount to anything more than open-ended continuity *within* time; it's sempiternal rather than eternal. It's certainly a long way from the eschatological notion of a future judgement *after* a life is concluded. The ethicist's eternity 'does not come afterward, as for the knight, but he has had eternity in time, has preserved eternity in time', an eternity that is to be preferred to that found in 'a story from the Middle Ages about a poor wretch who woke up in hell and shouted "What time is it?"—whereupon the devil answered, "Eternity!"' (EO, 2:138–9/SKS 3, 137).

In *Sickness Unto Death* eternity plays a rather different role. The Anti-Climacan conception of the self is robustly theological in character, and thus we are told that 'to have a self, to be a self, is the greatest concession, an infinite concession, given to man, but it is also eternity's claim upon him' (SUD, 21/SKS 11, 137). And this 'claim' has a distinctly fatal hue. Eternity, for Anti-Climacus, refers not to continuity *within* time, but instead to a point at which 'the hourglass of temporality' has run out and worldly distinctions such as sex, class, and relative fortune have been dispensed with (SUD, 27/SKS 11, 143). In this context, eternity is a situation in which one's life *as a totality* receives a *final* judgement:

Eternity asks you and every individual in these millions and millions about only one thing: whether you have lived in despair or not... And if so, if you have lived in despair, then, regardless of whatever else you won or lost, everything is lost for you, eternity does not acknowledge you, it never knew you—or, still more terrible, it knows you as you are known and it binds you to yourself in despair. (SUD, 27–8/SKS 11, 143–4)

For Anti-Climacus, a human being who does not relate to itself in a self-constituting way (that is, who is in despair) fails to qualify as a self. It is whether a person has attained this status of selfhood that is at issue in the scenario of eternal judgement: 'No matter how much the despairing person avoids it... eternity nevertheless will make it manifest that his condition was despair' (SUD, 21/SKS 11, 136). As we saw in

Chapter 6, this threatens to lead us into a range of apparent contradictions about the circumstances under which selves can be lost and regained. You'll recall that the key to resolving these contradictions comes—ironically enough—from Judge William, who claims that we make a mistake when 'the eternal is drawn too much into temporal qualifications' (EO, 2:41/SKS 3, 48) such as continuity, duration, and completion. It seems clear from the discussion above that William *himself* makes this mistake in his discussion of the eternal as open-ended continuity. In *Sickness Unto Death*, however, this thought finds expression in the form of the thoroughly *present-tense* character of despair, which can only be asked about in terms of its presence or absence in the present moment. The judgement that one is in despair and thus not a self—the judgement of eternity—is a judgement of an *entire* human life, but one based upon its status as it is *now*. In that sense, we cannot speak of having *been* a self, only of whether this human being, if exposed to such a judgement right now, *is* a self.

In trying to understand what Kierkegaard means by describing the human being as a synthesis of the eternal and the temporal, Rudd discerns three possible readings of 'eternity'. The first is, he takes it, a deflationary one, and 'certainly weaker than Kierkegaard himself intended, though it is true to Kierkegaard as far as it goes': the 'eternal' element of the self is simply a poetic way of describing our reflective capacity to transcend the present moment in memory, anticipation and planning agency.<sup>20</sup> The second sense of 'eternal' picks out an orientation towards an unchanging Good (in keeping with the Platonic rather than Aristotelian teleology Rudd sees at work in Kierkegaard). The third possible reading of 'eternity' here is the strongest: the expectancy of a salvation *outside* of time, a perspective that '*will* give us a perspective on what our lives have been as a whole—and one in which all possibility of self-deception has been stripped away'.<sup>21</sup>

Rudd's first option maps neatly onto the view that the 'naked self' is merely a poetic way of describing our capacity for self-transcendence in planning and recollection. Alastair Hannay notes *Sickness Unto Death*'s assumption that 'human beings are peculiar among other beings by not being exhaustively identified by finite properties. There is an irreducible particularity, an "I", for which each "definite" collection of properties is its own collection', but goes on to speak of this particularity as a mere 'vantage point' that human beings can take upon themselves.<sup>22</sup> As we've seen, both Rudd and Davenport resist the idea that the 'naked self' could be anything more than this. However, Rudd also agrees with Marks that Kierkegaard does have 'an entirely realist belief in personal immortality',<sup>23</sup> but avers that we can go along with Kierkegaard quite a long way without holding such a belief ourselves, by taking immortality to be a regulative ideal rather than a metaphysical reality.<sup>24</sup> I agree wholeheartedly with Rudd both that Kierkegaard is a realist about immortality and

<sup>20</sup> Rudd 2012, p.164.

<sup>23</sup> Rudd 2012, p.166.

<sup>21</sup> Rudd 2012, p.166.

<sup>24</sup> Rudd 2012, p.166.

<sup>22</sup> Hannay 1998, pp.339–40.

that if we instead take immortality as a regulative ideal we can still find much to agree with in his work. But these claims do open up the point that the ‘naked self’ needs the sort of experiential dimension I’ve been ascribing to it here: a sense of itself as being *more than* the totality of a human life, precisely because it is *answerable for* that totality. My human life, what I am, have been and will be, presents itself to the subject I experience myself as being now as the thing for which I am to answer, something I must subjectively appropriate—and which I can fail to appropriate properly.

Rudd rejects the idea that the ‘minimal self’ of Damasio, Strawson, and Zahavi, which I’ve here identified with William/Anti-Climacus’ ‘naked self’, exists atemporally, outside of time.<sup>25</sup> As we’ve seen, it might seem truer to say that the naked self exists in a sort of eternal present, always in the here-and-now, such that we can’t meaningfully speak of its duration or of conditions for its re-identification (which, for Johnston, is precisely why such entities cannot ultimately matter). But Kierkegaard does not leave things at that. Rather, in being concerned for how the naked self interacts with the human being—the phenomenal correlate of the human being relating to itself—Kierkegaard articulates a bivalent temporality to match this bifurcate selfhood. As we’ve seen, the here-and-now subject relates in the present to its past and its future, but it does so in a way that points in the direction of eternity understood as a final judgement over the whole. As such, a key part of Kierkegaard’s phenomenology of selfhood is that, insofar as we are both present-tense subjects *and* diachronically extended human beings, we simultaneously live both in time *and* in eternity. And that ramifies through our experience of time itself.

## Eternity as Judgement

For someone who writes as extensively as he does on death, Kierkegaard is surprisingly reluctant to say much about the nature of posthumous existence. I’ve argued elsewhere that Kierkegaard steers around this topic because he regards asking such questions as a means of evading the existential import of death: the thought of death should focus our attention on how we live our lives, not how we might live after our deaths.<sup>26</sup> He makes this point most forcefully in the discourse ‘There Will Be a Resurrection of the Dead, Of The Righteous—And The Unrighteous’, which dismisses any doubt over the reality of immortality: ‘Fear it, it is only all too certain; do not doubt whether you are immortal—tremble, because you are immortal’ (CD, 203/SKS 10, 212). Once we equate immortality with *judgement*, all other words expended on the nature of immortality become a waste of precious time: ‘There is not one more word to say about immortality; the one who says one more word or a word in another direction had better beware of judgement’ (CD, 206/SKS 10, 215). In the light of final judgement, wondering what the afterlife will be like or whether your childhood pets

<sup>25</sup> Rudd 2012, p.200.

<sup>26</sup> See Stokes 2013a.

are waiting for you in heaven becomes an indefensible squandering of your remaining moments of life.

So it's quite consistent that Kierkegaard says very little about what immortality would be like. But he is nonetheless clear about what immortality is not. In *Christian Discourses* Kierkegaard insists that 'Immortality is not a continued life, a continued life as such in perpetuity, but immortality is the eternal separation between the righteous and the unrighteous; immortality is no continuation that results as a matter of course but a separation that results from the past' (CD, 205/SKS 10, 214), while in 'An Occasional Discourse' (better known as 'Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing') we read that 'eternity is certainly not like a new world, so that the person who had lived in time according to the ways of time and busyness, when happy and well he had arrived in eternity, now could try his hand at adopting the customs and practices of eternity' (UDVS, 66/SKS 8, 174).<sup>27</sup> Hence we are not to think of eternity as some other state that is somehow continuous with our present existence. Rather, eternity is presented to us as a sort of atemporal state of *final judgement*. To be immortal is to be subject to an eternal judgement over one's life.

And it is the *whole* of one's life that is at issue in this judgement. To return yet again to where we started, recall that Locke's ultimate concern with regard to personal identity is the soteriological imputability of each moment in a life. This raises, as we saw, a question about the relation between memory and imputability, and about whether we are ultimately (eschatologically) responsible for parts of our life we no longer have memory access to. I've argued that in his account of contemporaneity, Kierkegaard rejects the intuition that we are somehow less responsible for those parts of our life that are further away from us in time—an *eternal* judgement, being outside of time, is, so to speak, equidistant with all moments in time, including all moments in any given life. The experience of contemporaneity, of a past event's happening *for me now*, is the phenomenal expression of that equidistance. But beyond parts of our life that we might be affectively alienated from, Kierkegaard also insists that we are responsible for those to which we have no memory access at all:

What a terrible responsibility when at some time, if not sooner, then in eternity, a person's recollections rise up accusingly against him, recollections of the many times and the many ways God spoke to him, but futilely, in his inner being. Recollections, yes, because even if he himself has long forgotten what was wasted, so that he therefore does not recollect it, God and

<sup>27</sup> See also JP, 1955/SKS 26, 169; NB32:72: 'But people go along living in the foolish opinion that one automatically continues the life one leads here on earth in all eternity, that one takes the city in which one lives, everything, everything directly into eternity. That is why men who would shudder at the changes and isolation of emigrating to another continent nonetheless think they will live for eternity.' See also Whittaker 2000, p.194: 'In eternity, there are no "customs" and there is no "busyness." There are no *means* at all by which one's wishes are brought to fulfillment, since eternity is removed from all striving and gaining and succeeding.'

eternity have not forgotten it; he is reminded of it, and in eternity it becomes his recollection. (CD, 253–4/SKS 110, 267)

In ‘An Occasional Discourse’ we’re further told that the God before whom we are to make this eternal accounting is omniscient, and ‘knows every thought from afar, knows clearly all its paths, *even when it sneaked past the person’s own consciousness*’ (UDVS, 22/SKS 8, 136, my emphasis). So what we are to be judged for doesn’t simply extend to the sins we’re conscious of, or those we’ve forgotten, but those that we were ignorant of as well. Once again, it seems that the extension of our eschatological responsibility can extend significantly beyond the boundaries of our consciousness—meaning that we take soteriological responsibility for something without completely knowing *what* we are answering for. This ultimate unknowability is acknowledged in a passage later in ‘An Occasional Discourse’ where it is made clear that we must simply believe that this seemingly impossible self-transparency will be brought about in eternity:

Yes, in temporality, where we are cross-questioned about one thing and another, in the multifariously compounded complexity of interaction we certainly would think it a delusion, a figment of the imagination, that each one of these countless millions of people could separately be convinced, accurately down to the very least detail, of what constitutes his life; but in eternity it can be done, because each one separately becomes the single individual. (UDVS, 131/SKS 8, 230)

Kierkegaard continually emphasizes this astonishing comprehensiveness of the account of our lives that we will be judged upon in eternity; ‘An Occasional Discourse’ tells us that ‘every idle word must be repeated in the transformation of eternity!’ (UDVS, 15/SKS 8, 131) and that eternity comprehends ‘everything, down to the least detail, down to the needless words that are spoken, has everything ready at every moment’ (UDVS, 66/SKS 8, 174). In his discussion of the problem forgotten misdeeds pose for Locke’s eschatological view of identity, Strawson argues that Locke is making ‘the commonsense point (it’s common sense relative to the story of the Day of Judgment) that human beings won’t on the Day of Judgment be responsible for all the things they have done in their lives, but only for those that they’re still Conscious of and so still Concerned in.’<sup>28</sup> Hence there is no problem of forgotten misdeeds for Locke’s account: what we answer for on the Day of Judgement is whatever we can remember on the day, and *that* is the boundary of our (forensic) personal identity. After all, says Strawson, ‘It would be very odd, given our ordinary understanding of moral being, if one’s wrongdoings simply piled up without any possible remission (although some enthusiasts of hellfire would have it so).’<sup>29</sup> Kierkegaard, it seems, is one such enthusiast. Unless we view his claims that we are to answer for ‘every idle word’ purely heuristically, as a way to motivate his reader to care about the soteriological

<sup>28</sup> Strawson 2011a, p.54.

<sup>29</sup> Strawson 2011a, p.56.

valence of their actions in a particularly thoroughgoing way (and that's an entirely reasonable and workable reading), then it seems he *is* claiming that every action, even those we no longer remember, have salvific (dis)value.

The same points is made in *The Sickness Unto Death*:

The arrangement is such that through the conscience the report promptly follows each guilt, and the guilty one himself must write it. But it is written with invisible ink and therefore first becomes clearly legible only when it is held up to the light in eternity while eternity is auditing the consciences. Essentially, everyone arrives in eternity bringing along with him and delivering his own absolutely accurate record of every least trifle he has committed or omitted. Thus a child could hold court in eternity; there is really nothing for a third party to do, everything down to the most insignificant word spoken is in order. (SUD, 124/SKS 11, 235)

In other words, viewed soteriologically we carry a repository of sins for we will have to answer in eternity. To this basis, we need to overlay the specifics of Christian harmatology and soteriology: as we saw in Chapter 1, Kierkegaard views guilt as a totality-category, not a mereological function of individual sins, and there is also the ever-present possibility of divine forgiveness. (There is also a very important difference for Kierkegaard between guilt and sin, but we can set this theological point aside for present purposes.) But that too is only to be expected given the temporality of despair we noted above. Our soteriological status is indexed to a human life we have led, are leading and will lead into the future, but our assessments of the status of this life are always made from a given point in time, a single moment where death—and therefore final judgement—looms over the whole.

Once again, we see a split between the present-tense self, the being that knows itself as subject to final judgement, and the totality for which that self is answerable. Eternity for Kierkegaard *is* judgement—a judgement that constantly threatens the subject at any moment, and which is linked to the totality of a life. This is made clearest in 'An Occasional Discourse', where we see most perspicuously how Kierkegaard thinks we live in both the narrative time of the physical-psychological human being *and* in eternity, in a confluence that is captured phenomenologically in his account of 'the eleventh hour'.

## Purity of Heart: Narrative and Eternity

The fact we *could* die at any time pushes us to contemplate what would happen if we *did* die right now. Davenport here invokes Kierkegaard's discussion of 'the eleventh hour' (*ellefte Time*) in 'An Occasional Discourse,' the experience of ourselves *as if* 'we are already dead and our story finished, absolutely unchangeable', thereby giving us what Davenport takes to be a *metaphorical* experience of being out of time. Thus we can *metaphorically* experience the existential urgency conferred by the omnipresent



possibility of death as an experience of *already* having run out of time.<sup>30</sup> Davenport endorses my reading of Kierkegaard as offering us an experiential ‘co-presence’ with our own death through what the reader will now recognize as *samtidighed*. However, by now you may also be able to guess where I disagree with Davenport here: in his relegation of this experience to the *merely metaphorical*. It is true that we are *not* dead when we contemplate our lives as if the clock has already run out, but as will become clearer, I think there is something more than *merely* metaphorical about this way of viewing ourselves. Throughout the discourse ‘At a Graveside’ Kierkegaard sees the significance of death as being captured in the phrase ‘then all is over’, but, as Davenport points out, after contemplating this thought we realize that we’re still alive, that all is *not* over, and return to life with renewed energy and purpose. Yet for Kierkegaard, we live *in* the ambiguity of being always in time and in eternity, alive and dead, both living our lives and answering for them after the fact. The phenomenology of the ‘eleventh hour’ captures just that ambiguity.

In ‘An Occasional Discourse’ a key concern is the contrast between human life, with a narrative trajectory through time, and the eternal—with the complication that the individual lives in *both* registers of time simultaneously. Human time, the realm spoken of in Ecclesiastes in which ‘everything has its time’, is a realm of transition and change, characterized by an increasing narrowing of possibility. At one end of our lives, we enter the world with a vast range of possibilities spread out before us, but as we pass through life these possibilities are either actualized or pass us by. At the other end of our biological lives, the elderly person has more or less exhausted his possibilities, and lives ‘only in reflective recollection’, a life devoid of anticipation.<sup>31</sup>

The time of work and exhaustive effort is over, the time of desire and dance; life makes no more demands upon it; by being present, one thing is no closer to him than another, does not change his judgment in the expectation, does not change it in the decision, does not change it in regret. It has all been equalized by the pastness that as something completely past has nothing present to relate to. (UDVS, 8/SKS 8, 124)

The elderly person eventually has no future-regarding prospects and has nothing left to look forward to;<sup>32</sup> however full his life *has* been, for such a person ‘life was over and done with and he had become an absentee’ (UDVS, 8/SKS 8, 124). Kierkegaard suggests that the author of Ecclesiastes, being an old man himself, should have stressed that for ones such as him, there *was* a time for everything rather than *is* a time for everything—a statement that sets up a contrast between a human life

<sup>30</sup> Davenport 2012, p.161.

<sup>31</sup> On the asymmetry of our attitudes towards past and future events in Kierkegaard, see Stokes 2010b.

<sup>32</sup> Adam Buben points out to me that Kierkegaard may be being a bit harsh here: surely there are some possibilities—perhaps a very large number of them in fact—that are still on the table even for the very old? Quite possibly. But even so, presumably that set is still smaller in old age than in youth; the twenty-five-year-old can train for a marathon *and* feed the pigeons in the park, while only the second of those options might be open to the ninety-five-year-old. That said, it may be that there are possibilities that *only* open up for the elderly, which Kierkegaard doesn’t allow for.

regarded atemporally (which would licence saying there *is* a time for everything, if, viewed atemporally, all times are equally real) and time as it appears for us as temporally emplaced, mid-stream humans, caught between a past that is no longer and a future that is not yet. For us, there will come a time when the Lucretian banquet is all over bar the coffee,<sup>33</sup> and we find ourselves bereft of possibilities for action. As David Kangas notes in his dialogue with Martin Kavka, this is why Kierkegaard's discourse uses the biblical figure of Anna to illustrate the virtue of 'patience in expectancy': 'She is old, childless, widowed; her life is essentially over. Of time she has nothing left to expect.'<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, in arguing for the narrative interpretability of our lives, Velleman notes that while almost any beginning could be the beginning of a good life, by the time we hit old age the things we do and the things that happen to us are unlikely to shift our understanding and evaluation of our life: too much of it is simply set in stone for genuinely radical revisions to be possible.<sup>35</sup>

Thus human life is temporally schematized in a broadly narrative way. In what has become known as A-Series time,<sup>36</sup> human beings experience moments in time, and the events they contain, as having changing temporal properties: not yet present, present, no longer present. Moreover, life follows a certain biologically determined narrative of birth, growth, and decay, whereby possibilities arise and decline in an inexorable movement towards death. What's interesting is that Kierkegaard explicitly says that humans share this narratively schematized temporal character with animals and even plants (UDVS, 9–10/SKS 8 125–6). Even for flowers everything 'has its time', and the flower will come to a point where all of its stages of life have passed from potentiality into the past. So the temporality in which everything has an appropriate time and in which possibilities eventually run out is essentially a feature of the human qua organism. The possibilities open to us may be infinitely richer in variety and scope than those available to a plant or a nonhuman animal, but they are nonetheless finite and exhaustible. Hence there is a temporality that pertains to human beings regarded as bounded organic systems: what Locke called our 'man' identity, in contrast to our identities as persons or selves. Of course what pertains to the human here is more than merely biological and may include social factors as well—there may be a socially conventional 'time' to marry, have children, or retire, for instance—though these still fall within a temporal structure that is on some level determined by our organic constitution.

But for humans, according to Kierkegaard, this progressive exhaustion of possibilities is only half of the story. 'If there is something eternal in a human being'

<sup>33</sup> 'Why do you bemoan and bewep death? If your past life has been a boon, and if not all your blessings have flowed straight through you and run to waste like water poured into a riddled vessel, why, you fool, do you not retire from the feast of life like a satisfied guest and with equanimity resign yourself to undisturbed rest?' (Lucretius 2001, pp.92–3).

<sup>34</sup> Kangas and Kavka 2008, p.131.

<sup>35</sup> Velleman 1993, p.341; for a helpful discussion, see Behrendt 2014.

<sup>36</sup> As originally outlined in McTaggart 1908.

(UDVS, 11/SKS 8, 126) then there is another order of things that pertain to the lives of human beings and that is not subject to change: 'Only the eternal applies at all times and is always, is always true, pertains to every human being of whatever age' (UDVS, 9/SKS 8, 124). Hence if there is something eternal in humans, then there is a solution to the problem of exhausted possibilities: while possibilities relating to our organism-identity (or some extension thereof) will eventually run out, some other set of possibilities is immune, as it were, to the ravages of time. There may be an appropriate time for playing hide-and-seek, for partying until dawn, for raising children, and for spoiling your grandkids, but eventually these activities will in turn cease to be fully possible. But *some* set of tasks remain fully and equally realizable (and insofar as they are *tasks* in Kierkegaard's sense of normatively binding possibilities,<sup>37</sup> always required) no matter how young or old the human may be. Thus there is always something still to be done.

As we've seen, there are divergent understandings of 'eternity' at work across Kierkegaard's corpus, but in 'An Occasional Discourse' the emphasis is, as in *The Sickness Unto Death*, on a thoroughly soteriological sense of the term. As noted, the temporality in which possibilities arise and decay is a function of our organic identity, one that we share with animals and plants. If nonhuman animals could talk, they too could declare that there is 'a time to run with the herd and a time to go apart and die' and so forth (UDVS, 10/SKS 8, 126). This is the inexorable fate of the organic, including the human. But Kierkegaard also takes it that we are immortal—and this changes everything. To be immortal is to live simultaneously in the organic time proper to us as human beings, *and* in the eternity that pertains to us as eschatological subjects. 'Being immortal' is a qualification that is eternal both in the sense of involving an 'eternal life' outside time, and in the sense that a person's immortality must be present at all moments of their otherwise changeable life (UDVS, 10–11/SKS 8, 126).

As we've seen, Kierkegaard insists immortality cannot be understood as continuous with our earthly life; the afterlife will not partake of the A-Series, will-be-present/is-present/was-present temporal structure of our earthly life.<sup>38</sup> Immortality instead refers to an eternal state that as such is both changeless and omnipresent; while we speak of an *afterlife* and 'the life to come', these states are strictly speaking atemporal and so present at *all* moments (and therefore, in Davenport's term, 'accessible from *any* point in historical time' and 'always meaningful as a *present* possibility for mortal persons, which is accessible to them *throughout* "profane" time').<sup>39</sup> The 'eternal separation of the righteous and unrighteous' is simultaneously both yet to occur and always present.

<sup>37</sup> Elrod 1975, p.57.

<sup>38</sup> On the 'ambiguous temporal character' of the hereafter and its 'paradoxical relation to the linear sequence of time', see Davenport 2002, p.44.

<sup>39</sup> Davenport 1996, p.234.

The human being, then, finds themselves at the intersection of two radically different and seemingly incompatible realms, one temporal and characterized by shifting properties of past, present, and future, the other eternal and atemporal.<sup>40</sup> This is precisely the model of temporality that Kierkegaard's pseudonym Virgilius Haufniensis had outlined three years earlier in *The Concept of Anxiety*. Here we are introduced to the category of 'the moment' (*Øjeblikket*) as the 'ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other . . . whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time' (CA, 89/SKS 4, 392). For humans, time is not simply immersion in the flow of events, nor immersion plus the ability to project into the past and future (the Heideggerian *ekstases*). Rather, once consciousness has become qualified by the realization of answerability or responsibility for a whole life, we live simultaneously *in* the flow of time *and* in a concerned survey of our whole life. We are concerned both for the self we are now, with the possibilities and tasks appropriate to our stage of biological, cultural, and social life, *and* with the overall assessment of our life *as a whole*. To re-use an analogy I've used elsewhere,<sup>41</sup> one ultimately indebted to the early anti-narrativist Louis O. Mink,<sup>42</sup> on Kierkegaard's view we are simultaneously in the middle of the river and high above it, surveying the whole from source to sea. Note, however, that—as with so much in Kierkegaard's picture of selfhood—this is as much a *task* as a description of how selfhood simply *is*. Once we are concerned for both our life in the present moment and the character of the whole, then, as M. Jamie Ferreira puts it, 'The task is to try to be in two places at the same time',<sup>43</sup> to be simultaneously in the infinite and the finite. For Kierkegaard, it's soteriology that achieves this: 'the expectancy of an eternal salvation is able (which otherwise seems impossible) to be in two places at the same time: it works in heaven and it works on earth' (EUD, 259/SKS 5, 255).

## The Eleventh Hour

While temporality and eternity are, strictly, two irreconcilable and mutually exclusive elements, when they meet in the sort of experience Kierkegaard describes, the experience of the *øjeblik* (which like the German *augenblick* literally refers to the blink or glance of an eye) the result is quite distinctive. We mentioned in Chapter 2 the contrast, as discussed by Charles Taylor, between 'higher' or sacred time and 'ordinary' time, 'the time which is measured in ages, over against higher time, God's time, or eternity'.<sup>44</sup> And a key feature of higher time is that while it is non-temporal, it also represents a *conclusion* or 'gathering' of time, understood in the eschatology of the Abrahamic faiths as a final justification of existence. The judgement of eternity is

<sup>40</sup> See also the discourse 'How Glorious It Is to Be a Human Being': 'Since, then, the human being is consciousness, he is the place where the eternal and the temporal continually touch each other, where the eternal is refracted in the temporal' (UDVS, 195/SKS 8, 292).

<sup>41</sup> Stokes 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Mink 1970.

<sup>43</sup> Ferreira 2010, p.14.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor 2007, p.265.

a denouement of the narrative of existence. As Taylor, very pregnantly for our purposes, puts it: 'The idea here is that the whole story belongs to the end, and not just the last state it arrives at... The final meaning of any incident is given in the whole, the "judgment" on it is made in the light of the whole.'<sup>45</sup>

Hence, as J. M. E. McTaggart also noted, in his lesser-known follow-up to his seminal paper 'The Unreality of Time', while eternity is atemporal it presents itself to us *in* time as radically futural.<sup>46</sup> Being the completion of the whole, eternity appears to us as *not yet*<sup>47</sup> even though strictly speaking eternity cannot bear temporal predicates. As Haufniensis puts it in *The Concept of Anxiety*, in 'a certain sense the future is the whole of which the past is only a part' (CA, 89/SKS 4, 392), for 'the future is the incognito in which the eternal, even though it is incommensurable with time, nevertheless preserves its association with time' (CA, 89/SKS 4, 392). For Haufniensis, this futurity of the eternal gives the categories of human, A-series time (past, present, future) a decisiveness that they lack on their own, for in human time without the eternal, 'the concepts of conversion, atonement, and redemption are lost in the world-historical significance and lost in the individual historical development' and 'the concepts of resurrection and judgment are destroyed' (CA, 90/SKS 4, 393). If, however, I see myself as located at the intersection of eternity and temporality—that is, if I see myself as an immortal subject who will have to answer for this particular human life in eternity—then the past is not simply past and gone, but something I am to *repent* for, while the future is not simply not yet to come but contains an eschatological completion that could come *at any time* and in light of which I am to live in the present in a certain way. Hence, this intersection is a troubled place to find ourselves. In a journal entry from 1854, Kierkegaard describes the 'frightful restlessness' in the thought that 'Before you lies an eternity—your fate is decided in this life, by how you use it. You have perhaps thirty years left, perhaps ten, perhaps five, perhaps one, perhaps, perhaps only one month, one day' (JP, 4807/SKS 26, 49; NB 31:67).

In 'An Occasional Discourse' this transfiguring of our experience of time by awareness of the eternal—or the awareness of temporality as the *refraction* (*Brydning*) of the eternal (UDVS, 90/SKS 8, 195)—serves to overcome the sense of exhausted possibilities that, as we saw above, is the fate of human beings viewed organically. For beings who are bi-located in time and eternity, there is *always* something that must be done, and even if all our possibilities are exhausted there still remains the work of repenting for our past failings (UDVS, 13/SKS 8, 128). This requirement to repent represents both the ways in which the eternal and temporal are coordinate in earthly life, and the order of priority between them. The things of earthly life may have their specific time, but repentance does not: it is an omnipresent duty and as such craves immediate fulfilment (UDVS, 13/SKS 8, 128).

<sup>45</sup> Taylor 2007, p.277.

<sup>46</sup> McTaggart 1909.

<sup>47</sup> Erlandson 1978, p.138.

As we've seen in our discussion of contemporaneity, soteriological repentance also changes our relationship to the past and the future from one of linear distance to one of phenomenal presence. Kierkegaard contrasts a person who merely strives within human time and who 'hurries ahead to something new, to something new—perhaps also away from the [past] experience' with someone who, by *regretting* that past event, 'laboriously gathers up [*samlar*] the experience' (UDVS, 14/SKS 8, 129). Thus while in an earthly sense our past misdeeds are continually moving further and further away from us, regarded as objects of repentance in the context of eschatological time, this distance is cancelled; they are equally omnipresent. As we've already seen, there is no transmission loss of soteriological valence. We become *contemporary* in Kierkegaard's phenomenological sense with our past when that past is understood as something we are, at every moment, fully answerable for in the eschatological time-context.

Equally, with regard to the future, repentance understands itself as oriented towards a final judgement that looms not as a temporally distant event but as something perpetually imminent:

Repentance and regret belong to the eternal in a human being, and thus every time repentance comprehends the guilt it comprehends that it is in the eleventh hour, that hour which human indolence knows very well exists and will come when it is spoken of in generalities, but not when it applies personally to the indolent person himself, for even the old man believes that there is still time left, and the indolent youth fools himself if he thinks that age difference is the main factor with regard to the closeness of the eleventh hour. (UDVS, 15/SKS 8, 130)

Again, note that the orientation towards an eternal judgement draws a contrast between narrative-biological time and eschatological time. For both the old and the young, eschatological regret arises at the same time, the 'eleventh hour', the context in which judgement looms immanently; any other regret is merely 'temporal' regret, 'fortifie[d] with a deceptive and busy notion of the length of life' and not oriented towards eternity (UDVS, 15/SKS SKS 8, 130). According to this understanding, the attitude that I can simply do what I want and then repent on my deathbed, or that I have plenty of time left to make amends to the friend I wronged last year, or that while I am living selfishly now I can devote myself to charitable causes in my retirement, are all false forms of repentance. They evade the 'eleventh hour' urgency imposed on us by the thought of an eternal judgement, and treat repentance as just another possibility that 'has its time' in linear human temporality. Eternity appears as something infinitely far away: to use a phrase from later in the discourse, to such a person 'eternity is the deceptive illusion of the horizon, for him eternity is the bluish boundary of time' (UDVS, 63/SKS 8 171). Conversely, 'When regret wakes up troubled, be it in the youth or in the old man, it always wakes up at the eleventh hour' (UDVS, 15/SKS 8, 130). For beings aware of their status as answerable for their lives, time is *always* phenomenally qualified as the eleventh hour; eternity looms as a

judgement that is *always imminent* and invests all moments of mortal life with the sense that *time's almost up*.

This picture of human beings as located at the meeting point of two temporal orders, a realization that transfigures the understanding of merely human time, also finds expression in the discourse 'We Are Closer to Salvation now than when We Became Believers'. Here, Kierkegaard claims that just as we need to fix a point on a map as 'here' to make sense of the term 'there', so too we need to specify a fixed point in time to make sense of the term 'now':

If I am to determine where I am *now*, I must have another definite point in time in relation to which I determine this *now*. Therefore the verse chosen as the subject of this discourse quite properly has another determinant with the aid of which those speaking determine this *now*: We are closer to salvation *now* than *when* we became believers. This makes excellent sense. If a man says, 'I am now further along in this and that work than when I began,' it makes sense and there is a determination of time; he has one point of time with the aid of which it is firmly established that he has begun, and he measures the distance from the beginning to see where he is now. But if this man had never begun this work, well, then his talk makes no sense; it is meaningless to say that one is closer *now* than *when* one began if one did not begin at all. If someone who had never become a believer were to repeat unthinkingly these words, 'We are closer to salvation now than when we became believers,' it would be meaningless. (CD, 216/SKS 10, 224)

At first blush, this seems to posit salvation as a future event in straightforward continuity with the past and present. If we are believers, then our eventual salvation is nearer at hand than it was at any point in the past, just as today is closer to the year 2099 than yesterday was. Conversely, if we are *not* believers, there is no salvation in our future, and therefore we are no 'closer' to it, for we can have *no* specifiable distance to something that does not exist. Nothing in this specific text pushes us away from this simple reading, but the ambiguity of eschatological time noted above might lead us to read these passages differently.

Kierkegaard's map analogy is interesting in that connection. Drawing on David Lewis' use of a similar analogy to explain how we come to relate our propositional knowledge of the world to our self-ascription of properties,<sup>48</sup> Velleman argues that a symbol on a map telling us that 'This map is here' (or more commonly 'You are here') serves as a principle of translation between the representational scheme of the map and the topography I see before me. The indexical 'here' acts as a common co-ordinate for the two systems of reference, and as such allows me to translate between them.<sup>49</sup> In a similar way, the 'now' that Kierkegaard describes—the moment—has a

<sup>48</sup> Lewis 1979, esp. pp.519–22.

<sup>49</sup> Velleman 2006a, pp.175–8. Velleman uses this analogy to answer a concern of Nagel's: if I can give a complete, objective account of the world, including all the facts about a person TN, it seems I cannot locate within that account the fact that I am TN. The worry—a version of which Lewis shares—is that there might be some sort of knowledge that is subjectively accessible but not objectively so. Velleman thinks the map analogy shows us the way out of this problem: the thought 'I am TN' serves to co-ordinate a decentred view

double indexicality. 'Now' picks out the present time we see around us (just like the 'here' I see by looking around), but to someone who has previously become a believer, this 'now' has a reference in soteriological time as well. Of necessity, we are closer to any future event now than we were in the past; but only if one has become a *believer* is one underway in soteriological time: as soon as one becomes a believer, it is the eleventh hour with respect to eschatological judgement, and salvation (or damnation) appears infinitely closer (though still necessarily futural) than it did previously. This explains the fact that we don't need to specify some past moment in calendar time when we became a believer: 'It is not important whether it was at twelve o'clock noon and the like. No, it is all a spiritual matter and therefore has true earnestness, which certainly does not ask the hour or the minute' (CD, 217/SKS 10, 225). It is not the precise distance between past and present that matters, but that one's status as a believer situates them at the soteriological eleventh hour.<sup>50</sup> Hence for the believer, there is a principle for translating between the two different temporal contexts: 'now' refers to '*n* years since I became a believer' (regardless of whether we can specify the value of *n* or not) in human time and 'the eleventh hour' in eschatological time. The problem, as Kierkegaard sees it, is that many self-professed believers, who simply *assume* that they became believers at some forgotten point in the past (CD, 218/SKS 10, 226), live in the simple continuity of human time.

## Implications for Narrative Selfhood

In the above discussion of human time and eternity I've tried to show that the former is a function of our status as organic entities, while the latter relates to our status as eschatological subjects, beings who will have to answer in eternity for our lives and who will be subject to some sort of eternal judgement. This dual temporality follows the ontology of self articulated in *The Sickness Unto Death*, where there is a key distinction between the diachronically extended *human being* (*mennesket*) and the here-and-now self (*selvet*). Thus when Anti-Climacus declares that 'It is Christian heroism—a rarity, to be sure—to venture wholly to become oneself, an individual human being, this specific human being, alone before God, alone in this prodigious strenuousness and this prodigious responsibility' (SUD, 5/SKS 11, 117), this 'oneself' exists at the juncture of two identities: a human identity, stretched across time, and an eschatological identity that mediates that human's life and a future eternal judgement. But what is the significance of this soteriological picture for narrative accounts of selfhood, and indeed for personal identity more broadly?

of the world (like the map) and a centred view (like my perspectively structured view of the topography it represents).

<sup>50</sup> See also Taylor 2007, p.55 on the way in which 'higher times gather and re-order secular time' and thereby 'introduce "warps" and seeming inconsistencies in profane time-ordering'.



As we've seen, both Rudd and Davenport, as representatives of the narrativist interpretation of Kierkegaard, reject any attempt to view the 'naked self' of Judge William and Anti-Climacus as an ontologically distinct, significant being. Rather, they regard Kierkegaard's correlate of the minimal/core self of contemporary discussions as either a mere abstraction, or a poetic reification of our capacity to transcend our immediate situation in freedom of reflection and action. That is, I think, an easier position to maintain if we stick to Judge William, whose minimal self is like a mathematical vanishing point, an almost extensionless moment between aesthetic immediacy and ethical choice. This 'naked' self is the condition for effecting the detachment from what the human being immediately *is*, and is therefore a formal requirement for becoming a narratively integrated self; but ultimately it's a mere staging post on the journey to integrated practical selfhood. The Anti-Climacan naked self, by contrast, is a feature of *all* self-experience. It too lacks temporal extension, not because it is a vanishing moment within the event of choice, but because the self's entire existence qua self (i.e. as transcending and appropriating its facticity) is always present-tense. Selves are always 'in the moment', not in the aesthetic sense of living with no thought to the past or future, but in the sense that the naked self continually stands before the ever-present possibility of eternal judgement as responsible *for* the concrete narratively schematized person that it both *is* and *transcends*.

Thus each work can be understood as offering different accounts of how the minimal and narrative selves interact. But one of these approaches is considerably more compatible with the narrativist project than the other. The focus of Judge William's discussion of selfhood is the self as a site of historical continuity, integrated through a conscious choice back into the factual context from which it momentarily distinguished itself. In that sense it does indeed resemble the sort of narratively emplotted, socially embedded self that philosophers like MacIntyre seek to describe. Undeniably, there is much in *Sickness Unto Death* that also seems *prima facie* compatible with narrativist readings of Kierkegaard; after all, eternal judgement's concern with the meaning of a *whole* human life (rather than some portion thereof) has obvious resonances with the whole-life-intelligibility that writers like Rudd posit. However, the resolutely present-tense nature of the Anti-Climacan naked self aligns it far more with the minimal self of Zahavi et al., a sense of presence-to-self that is the condition for the self-appropriation needed in order to constitute the narrative self. The Anti-Climacan self that 'rests transparently in the power which established it' (SUD 14/SKS 11, 130) is a point of consciousness that takes eschatological responsibility for a concrete self which it must nonetheless take itself to transcend. Judge William's self attains eternity in time, *within* its own narrative; Anti-Climacus' self exists in 'the moment'—the intersection of time and eternity—and thus has a sense of itself as always already beyond its own narrative.

Yet this divergence between Judge William and Anti-Climacus may point in a productive direction for utilizing Kierkegaard in discussions of both narrative

identity and personal identity more broadly. In wrestling with the mortality and survival problem for narrative theories, both Rudd and Davenport both concede that the *ultimate* meaning of our lives, the 'gathered story' in Taylor's terms, may be permanently beyond us. But they also thereby begin to treat death, and the idea of eschatological judgement, as presenting us with a sort of regulative ideal; we are to live *as if* we are heading towards an ending that will make sense of our lives in a certain way. Hence Kierkegaard has served to make the sense of 'narrative meaning' aimed at by narrativists slightly more modest, and thereby more credible:

Kierkegaard's *Journals* argument about living forwards but understanding backwards clearly does renounce the ambition to have a narrative understanding of one's life that is 'complete' or 'total' while one is still living it. And he is obviously right that I can't, while still alive, understand my life as whole in the same way that my biographer might understand my life as a whole after my death. But, as Kierkegaard also insists, this does not mean that I am just left floundering in the ocean of time with no perspective beyond the present moment... my narrative self-understanding is not just an ability to tell a story about my past while looking back in a quiet moment; it is the implicit sense of my life that I have as I live it and carry it forward. And although this narrative self-understanding is not a total or complete one, there is still a sense in which he is an understanding of a whole life, and not just of particular episodes in it.<sup>51</sup>

The specifically soteriological character of Kierkegaard's account too helps to bring something important to salience for narrativists. As we've seen, narrativists such as MacIntyre and Rudd see narratives as securing the coherence of *lives* rather than merely of actions or episodes. They are therefore linked to the *ultimate* intelligibility and meaning of a given human life. And it's that ultimate meaning that is centralized by soteriology, with its thought of a final, comprehensive judgement of *everything I am, have been, and will be*. In other words, to the extent that we do in fact have such a concern, a concern for what we are and what the ultimate value of our lives might turn out to be, our concern is *already* soteriological. What Kierkegaard's discussions of our accounting for 'every idle word' show us, therefore, is what it is to be concerned in this way, in precisely the way that Locke envisaged when he inaugurated the modern discussion of personal identity: concern for every moment of our lives, linked to 'fatal' responsibility, without 'transmission loss' across time.

By situating the subject at the intersection of time and eternity, Kierkegaard brings out something crucial for the narrativist: the way in which, like any narrator, 'we live beyond any tale we happen to enact' as Galen Strawson has recently put it.<sup>52</sup> Our separateness qua experiencing subjects from our lives qua human beings is, as we've seen in our discussions of alienation and contemporaneity, a deep phenomenal fact about us. There is a structural gulf between our experience of ourselves as present-tense subjects and our understanding of ourselves as beings stretched out across time.

<sup>51</sup> Rudd 2012, p.190.

<sup>52</sup> Strawson 2012.

This gulf must be *bridged* through an act of phenomenal appropriation motivated by fatal concern, seeing our past and future person-stages *as ourselves*. Though I don't claim to speak for narrativists, I think they should in fact welcome this finding, rather than trying to downplay the minimal/narrative self split: it brings out the extent to which narrative identity, if narrative is in fact how we constitute ourselves, is a task and achievement rather than something automatically given.

Moreover, this account of living at the intersection of narrative-biological-human time and the eternity of a final judgement over a whole life points the discussion of personal identity in a new, and I think deeply important, direction. We opened this book with an overview of the mess that fifty years of metaphysics has left us in with regard to personal identity. Part of this mess is, I'd suggest, the result of a standing assumption that selves can be reduced to an objective (that is, not dependent upon any particular perspective) set of subpersonal persistence conditions, whether physical, psychological, or both. It has, at least, gradually become clear in discussions of personal identity that the first-person perspective is irreducibly important in getting to grips with personal identity. More than twenty years ago, Geoffrey Madell warned us that a 'relentlessly third-personal approach' to this topic will 'stand no chance of working',<sup>53</sup> while Bernard Williams before him had noted that perspective matters greatly in discussing questions of survival,<sup>54</sup> and metaphysicians of the self such as Baker<sup>55</sup> have gone on to make an irreducible first-person perspective part of their account of the self. Kierkegaard, with his radical emphasis on subjectivity, seems to fit in well with this increasing emphasis on the first-person perspective in discussing what it is to be a self.

But Anti-Climacus' work suggests that selves are not mere irreducibly *first-person-perspectival*, but also *present-tense-perspectival*. Narrativists can perhaps tell us much about how we understand and articulate the ways in which we fill out diachronic careers. But we always understand and articulate from *here and now*—an unavoidable fact about what it is to be a first-personal subject. We can never get out of the present moment, so to speak. The gap this fact opens up at the heart of subjectivity is something the literature is only just beginning to come to grips with.

What I think Kierkegaard points us towards is a way of thinking about personal identity that refuses to collapse the first- and third-person perspectives, and the present-tense and diachronic perspectives on a self into a *single* perspective. As we've seen, the moment we try to derive a straightforward metaphysics of continuity from Anti-Climacus' account of the constitution of selfhood, we end up wrapped up in all sorts of apparent paradoxes. The only way to avoid these is to keep the present-tense perspective of the subject and the diachronic, third-personal continuity of the human separate rather than collapsing the former into the latter, seeing the 'now' of the subject as just one moment in the career of the human being. That means renouncing

<sup>53</sup> Madell 1991, p.127.

<sup>54</sup> Williams 1973, pp.46–63.

<sup>55</sup> Baker 2000.

the ambition to provide an account of how we can *re-identify* selves (in the sense of present-tense phenomenally-figured subjects, I\*s) across time, but this needn't mean, as it does for Johnston, that such selves cease to be worth worrying about. I think it's truer to say that we *cannot* stop worrying about them.

In pushing us towards the *øjeblik* as the place where our lives as human beings in time and our ultimate soteriological status outside time intersect, Kierkegaard draws our attention to what I think may well be the next move in the personal identity debate. Rather than trying to give one master account of what selves *ultimately are*, Kierkegaard draws our attention to how these different, irreducible perspectives on the self *interact*. That's a question that's already nascent in some of the discussions we've looked at, such as Strawson and Schechtman. But Kierkegaard fills in the details in a very fulsome way, providing rich accounts of ways in which we qua subjects can appropriate, misappropriate, or fail to appropriate our lives qua human beings. He both draws our attention to where the interesting problematic of selfhood lies, and gives us a rich account of what it is like to be both a present-tense self and a diachronic human, concerned for what we ultimately are and for the ultimate justification of our lives.

That, I think, is as far as Kierkegaard can take us here. But not all of us would want to follow him even this far. In Chapter 9, I'll consider some important objections to where this discussion has led us.

## 9

# Objections and Future Directions

### Summing Up

At this point, it might be helpful to summarize where this dialogue between Kierkegaard and analytic philosophy of personal identity has left us, before going on to consider possible objections and limitations of the position we've developed here.

We started where the modern discussion of personal identity begins, a beginning which has conditioned the entire debate ever since: with Locke's account of self-constitution through becoming 'self to oneself'. For Locke, this is closely connected to memory, though not, as we've seen, in the straightforward way in which Locke's critics imagined. For Locke, a subjective *concernment* in memory, not the simple fact that memory connections obtain between two person-stages, is crucial. Locke also sees this concernment as inherently linked to moral imputability and ultimately to eschatology, in such a way that our account of identity must be adequate to these concerns. What we *ultimately* are will be revealed to us on the Day of Judgement. For now, a model of identity based on concerned memory is enough for practical, moral, and soteriological purposes.

Kierkegaard too, as we've seen, sees a kind of concerned memory as critically important for selfhood. In distinguishing *erindring* from *hukommelse*, Kierkegaard claims that not all memory is equally constitutive of selfhood. What matters for selfhood is a distinctively self-reflexive kind of memory, one that relates what one remembers to oneself in an 'essential' sense that is indexed to one's ultimate soteriological status. The experiential character of this sort of memory became clearer through our examination of Kierkegaard's phenomenology of *samtidighed*. Here we saw that the self-constituting form of memory presents with a property of 'for-you-ness', a special way of relating back to the remembering subject that gives memories a property as if they are happening right now (the same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for imaginative anticipation). Again, this is tied to final soteriological status: events which connect with the experiencing subject in this way are 'contemporary' in that they present with the same urgency and significance for the subject as events happening directly in front of us. This serves, as we saw in our discussion of Velleman and Wollheim, to cancel out the distinction between the notional and actual subject of a visualization: the notional and actual subject are unified through this property of phenomenal contemporaneity. This sense of soteriological urgency also

serves to overcome the 'transmission loss' of responsibility across time that has sometimes been viewed as a problem for the neo-Lockean approach. The undeniable facts that we change over time, that our cares and concerns evolve, that the triumphs and injuries of life alter the fabric of who we are, and that we can become affectively alienated from the persons we were or expect we will become, sit uneasily with our more all-or-nothing intuitions about moral imputability. But by describing a form of subjective appropriation that makes all moments of the past and future *equally close* by virtue of their soteriological valence, Kierkegaard shows how this problem can be overcome. In so doing, he gives us a picture of what it is like to close the gap between our objective awareness of our careers across time as human beings, and our subjective, here-and-now sense of who we are. Moreover, he gives us reasons to think that we *should* appropriate the past and future in this way, reasons that are considerably stronger than what has been offered in the literature to date.

Thus far, we have already found in Kierkegaard resources that I've suggested are useful in the context of existing approaches to the problem of personal identity. A neo-Lockean reader could, if they wish, stop there. But I think this misses what is arguably Kierkegaard's most important contribution to this debate: not just showing us a richer account of neo-Lockean psychological continuity, but disrupting the metaphysical project of identity-as-continuity itself. The curious once-and-for-all character of despair (selflessness) makes talking about the *duration* of selves highly problematic. Humans or persons have continuity and exist across time, but selves are always present-tense affairs. To talk of their duration, even if this is metaphysically possible (as in the punctual selves of Strawson and Damasio) is to miss the point that this present-tense perspective is irreducibly essential to what selves are. We live in the present and know ourselves as a phenomenally given self that relates to a remembered past and an imagined future (in ways more complex than I've allowed for here—for instance, much of what we 'remember' is semantic rather than episodic memory, anticipation is conditioned by uncertainty, and so on).

Of course, what selves relate to is not the entire past and future, everything from stegosauruses to starships, but the past and future of a specific human being. And we do so because we are related to and concerned for that human being in a distinctive way. For Kierkegaard, that way is soteriological in nature. I relate concernfully to a given past and future as *my* past and future because that human life forms a totality for which I am ultimately answerable. Such affective identification is not a given, as the examples of alienation from one's own life demonstrate. Rather, for Kierkegaard, such relation is an achievement, and it's something we *should* attempt to achieve. This normativity is not driven by the psychological benefits we might receive by identifying emotionally with our past and future selves, nor even by the intelligibility conferred by understanding our lives in narrative terms. Rather it's driven by the idea that at the *present* moment I find myself answerable for that life, a fact which gathers my whole life up into a looming, ever-present possibility of final judgement. This realization changes our experience of time: the present moment that the self lives in

turns out to be phenomenally conditioned as the *next-to-last* moment, the perpetual eleventh hour.

This somewhat brisk account of the trajectory of this book reveals a number of points at which a reader might object, not simply to the fine detail, but to the overall project and to the results it yields. Seeing as Galen Strawson has been such a significant figure in this book, in this concluding chapter I'll borrow one of his more striking authorial techniques: the first-person use of an imagined critical interlocutor.

*So that's me, then?*

Exactly.

*Well as it happens, I do have at least three main objections to what you've written here. Shall we?*

Let's.

## Changing the Subject

I mentioned in the introduction that some readers would find this Kierkegaardian contribution to the analytic debate over personal identity deeply dissatisfying. Our italicized friend is one such reader:

*Look, I picked up this book expecting to learn something about personal identity. You led me to believe that this Kierkegaard chap had something of interest to say on this topic. But eight interminable chapters later this has turned out clearly not to be the case. Let's go back to basics: personal identity is a matter of what makes a person the same person across time. That's what I'm interested in. Not what it feels like to identify with someone in memory. Not what it feels like to experience responsibility for the past or future. I'm not interested in subjective, perspective-dependent properties such as these. (These experiences may presuppose personal identity, but they do not constitute it). No, I am interested in the facts of the matter about identity—if there are any—not how we subjectively relate to those facts. And from what you've said, Kierkegaard says nothing much at all about that topic. You haven't solved the problem of personal identity. All you've done is change the subject.*

As might be apparent, I find myself sceptical of there being a problem of personal identity, or rather, a problem that can be distilled to one (set of) question(s) that admits of one (set of) answer(s). And I'm certainly sceptical that we can give a purely metaphysical answer to the question that is wholly independent of phenomenology and therefore wholly objective. If we can't do so, it's certainly not for want of trying. Despite decades of constant discussion there are no signs of anything like an emerging consensus on that question, unless the eventual consensus is that we all simply give up and resort to a *de facto* eliminativism that leaves our everyday experience untouched. Various metaphysical research programmes addressing this topic have popped up and have simply continued on in parallel—because each

manages to address important sets of intuitions about identity that the others either ignore or simply rule out of court.

And all of these metaphysical approaches struggle to accommodate something that has been increasingly acknowledged at least since Williams: that you simply can't get at the core of what we're talking about when we talk about personal identity without giving the first-person perspective its due. Take a step back to consider why it's *personal* identity, rather than other identity problems (such as the Ship of Theseus) that we're so concerned with. As we've seen in our reading of Schechtman, personal identity connects with practical questions that are uniquely important to us, questions that excite our self-reflexive concern in distinctive ways. We've also seen that the question of personal identity ultimately has its origins in questions of *ultimate* concern, namely, questions of soteriology. A metaphysician might reasonably reply that this historical origin is irrelevant: the circumstances that lead us to ask a question needn't necessarily impact on the content of the question itself. But in this case, the impetus for the question colours the entire discussion. We *care* about what we are in ways that partly determine what we need to ask about in considering personal identity. Hence it's increasingly realized that if we want to talk about identity, then we need to talk about how first-person perspectives figure in identity.

Giving the first-person its due, however, may mean more than simply grafting such a perspective onto a metaphysical picture, for the first-person perspective *itself* may resist such incorporation. For one thing, a first-person perspective is also a temporally located perspective. It's a perspective from here-and-now. But metaphysics doesn't ask about the self-here-and-now, but about the duration of selves across time. Attempts to incorporate the phenomenal first-person perspective into an implicitly impersonal metaphysics, such as are offered by Strawson and Dainton, therefore have to elide the temporally perspectival character of that phenomenal self by asking about its duration, and so end up either having to appeal to sub-phenomenal factors to explain the continuity of self (Dainton) or posit a succession of short-lived selves (Strawson).<sup>1</sup> To ask how long a present-tense perspective lasts is to miss precisely what is essential to that perspective.

Kierkegaard's implicitly present-tense self, which subjectively appropriates a diachronically extended human life, brings into view the necessity of not collapsing first-personal and third-personal, and temporally bounded and atemporal, perspectives on the self and identity into a unitary metaphysical account.<sup>2</sup> We can't talk about what selfhood is like without allowing the first-personal-here-and-now aspect of selfhood to stand on its own terms. And doing so leaves us with a much more complex problem of personal identity than the one we started with. Instead of treating the self as a special sort of object and asking how long it lasts, the problem of personal identity now becomes a question of how different perspectives and forms

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller exposition of this argument, see Stokes 2014.

<sup>2</sup> On the possible combinations of these perspectives, see Stokes 2013b.



of continuity interact and influence each other, and of the forms of subjective appropriation that are an essential part of that process.

If someone still wants to insist that what I'm talking about here isn't 'real' identity, and that only an impersonal metaphysical account can tell us what we *really* are, I can only respond by stealing a line from Guy Debord: 'I have scarcely begun to make you understand that I don't intend to play the game.'<sup>3</sup>

## Setting Boundaries

*You can refuse to 'play the game' (or 'do proper metaphysics' as I'd prefer to call it) all you like, but what you offer here is still useless. For one thing, you're linking identity to moral imputability: I am everything I am to answer for. But it seems Kierkegaard never gives us any criteria for determining what we are and are not responsible for. If you want to talk about the present-tense subject relating to a diachronic human being in a responsibility-taking way, you have to delimit that human somehow.*

This is basically true, but I'm not sure it's a fatal problem. Kierkegaard, both under his own name and as Anti-Climacus, claims that there is something distinctively individuating about being a self *before God*. 'An Occasional Discourse' equates '*living in such a way that you are conscious of being a single individual* [en Enkelt]' with 'the earnest question about what each person is according to his eternal destiny, about what he is to be conscious of being, and when is this question more earnest than when before God he considers his life?' (UDVS, 127/SKS 8, 227). The discourse also stresses in several places that it is as this single individual that each human being is to face judgement,<sup>4</sup> and that this soteriological 'inspection' individuates each of us out of the mass-category of human beings: 'the most pernicious of all evasions is—hidden in the crowd, to want, as it were, to avoid God's inspection of oneself as a single individual, as Adam once did when his bad conscience fooled him into thinking that he could hide among the trees' (UDVS, 127/SKS 8, 228).<sup>5</sup> In eternity there is no crowd, merely each individual alone with the voice of conscience that probes 'the single individual about whether he as an individual has done good or evil, and about his not wanting to be an individual while he lived!' (UDVS, 128/SKS

<sup>3</sup> Debord 2003, p.39.

<sup>4</sup> For example, 'Indeed, in eternity the single individual, you, my listener, and I, will be questioned as an individual, alone by himself as an individual, and about the particulars in his life' (UDVS, 148–9/SKS 8, 245); 'Above all, each one separately is to become a single individual with all his responsibility before God; each one separately is to endure this rigorous judgment of singularity' (UDVS, 150/SKS 8, 247); 'Everyone must make an accounting to God as an individual; the king must make an accounting to God as an individual, and the most wretched beggar must make an accounting to God as an individual' (UDVS, 128/SKS 8, 228).

<sup>5</sup> *Christian Discourses* speaks of Christ *knowing* each person individually by virtue of sacrificing himself for every individual, not for the race as a whole—and this is in fact a necessary corollary of the nature of salvation, for Kierkegaard claims human beings *have* to be saved individually (CD, 272/SKS 10, 290).

SKS 8, 228). Awareness of the judgement of eternity *just is* ‘awareness of being a single individual’; the fact of eternal judgement ‘disperses the crowd’ and individuates ‘by giving each person separately an infinite weight by making him heavy—as the single individual’ (UDVS, 134/SKS 8, 233).<sup>6</sup>

Thus being before God in consciousness of one’s sinfulness involves a separation from the species and the receipt of a radically new identity beyond that available to us regarded purely as human beings. Yet Anti-Climacus also explicitly tells us that the individuality of a self before God, its irreducible particularity, cannot be comprehended in thought. As Kierkegaard reiterates again and again across his writings, the speculative tendencies of the nineteenth century subsume individual human beings into mass-categories, such as ‘what Aristotle calls the animal category—the crowd’ (SUD, 118/SKS 11, 229), precisely because the *category* of the human is thinkable while individual human beings are not: ‘The individual human being lies beneath the concept; an individual human being cannot be thought, but only the concept “man”’ (SUD, 119/SKS 11, 230). Thus there is an aspect to individuals that cannot be captured in their status as tokens of the species *Homo sapiens*, which is why, as Haufniensis puts it in *The Concept of Anxiety*, ‘each man who is mindful of himself knows what no science knows, since he knows who he himself is’ (CA, 78–9/SKS 4, 381–2). The idea that there is an irreducible particularity to individual persons, one that cannot be captured by universalizing systems of ethics or anthropology, is one that links Kierkegaard to twentieth-century figures such as Levinas and Derrida. But in *The Sickness Unto Death* this unthinkable residue is cashed out in specifically soteriological terms: ‘The category of sin is the category of individuality [*Enkelthedens Kategori*]. Sin cannot be thought speculatively at all’ (SUD, 119/SKS 11, 230). Thus there is an ‘earnestness’ (*alvor*) associated with being a ‘single individual’ qua sinner that is completely incomprehensible to an abstracted, metaphysical way of thinking that can only comprehend ‘single individuals’ as tokens of a type:

That is precisely why there is no earnestness about sin if it is only to be thought, for earnestness is simply this: that you and I are sinners. Earnestness is not sin in general; rather, the accent of earnestness rests on the sinner, who is the single individual. With respect to “the single individual,” speculation, if it is consistent, must make light of being a single individual or being that which cannot be thought. If it cares to do anything about this line, it must say to the individual: Is this anything to waste your time on? Forget it! To be an individual human being is nothing! Think—then you are all mankind: *cogito ergo sum*. (SUD, 119/SKS 11, 230–1)

So while being a ‘self before God’ in Kierkegaard’s terms—that is, being a self that knows itself as the subject of final judgement over its entire life—does provide a distinctive *principium individuationis*, the identity thus conferred turns out to exceed

<sup>6</sup> He also at one point, referencing Daniel 5:27 (‘Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting’) and offering his own image of *psychostasia* (see the following section, ‘How Far Can Non-Theists Go with Kierkegaard?’), speaks of our being ‘weighed’ by eternity (UDVS, 311/SKS 8, 403–4).

the capacities of impersonal, rational thought. The quasi-metaphor of an eternal accounting gives us an idea of how this individuation works: the soteriological self, which understands itself as the subject of an always-immanent final judgement outside of time, takes responsibility for the events in the life of this specific human being. Thus the self-reflexive relationship is, as in the Lockean sense, one of concerned moral *appropriation* of our past and future. But this tells us nothing about where the bounds of what we are to appropriate begin and end. Am I responsible for things I did in early childhood? What about responsibilities that go beyond my individual life? What of the unintended consequences of seemingly innocent actions—including consequences that occur well after my death?

Kierkegaard doesn't answer questions like this, and on his own account, cannot do so: the identity conferred by soteriological responsibility exceeds rational explication. But that may in fact be a feature rather than a bug. As we've seen, the earliest attempt (in Locke) to split the human qua organic entity and the self qua rational moral being responsible for whatever it can extend its consciousness to led to serious problems about imputability. And like Locke, Kierkegaard sees the self as a being that is ultimately answerable not just to human ethical norms, but to a final judgement in which the criteria of responsibility may well be different. On 'posthumous memory restoration' readings of Locke, at the final judgement selves will attain a pure self-transparency both to God and to themselves, such that 'In that moment selves will appear whole and complete, consciousness uniting not just those elements to which it has access under ordinary conditions, but everything that rightly belongs to the self,' whereby it attains 'not mere knowledge of its states of mind, but knowledge of its responsibility, and of the fate such responsibility entails'.<sup>7</sup> Even if that is what Locke meant, however, it means that the full extension of the self understood in Locke's forensic sense is unknown, and perhaps unknowable, while we live.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, Kierkegaard offers no more satisfactory answer to the question of the limits of eschatological responsibility than Locke does. The self that answers for the human being's actions cannot know the full extent of what it will be called to answer for, only that it *will* be called to such an accounting. In Kierkegaard's relational account of self, there is always a limit to the extent to which we can achieve self-transparency. But just as Locke can convincingly be read as a 'theological pragmatist'<sup>9</sup> on this question, rather than just a metaphysician who has painted himself into

<sup>7</sup> Seigel 2005, p.102; cf. Ayers 1991, p.272: 'it may be that Locke would have envisaged as a possibility that the fragmented and imperfect 'persons' which, from our human point of view, we see successively realized in a forgetful (not to say, drunken) man will somehow be continued at the resurrection in an eschatologically more satisfactory individual, embracing them all. For if the resurrection is going to involve some divine reconstruction anyway, a certain amount of constructive improvement in the direction of what is remembered might not seem out of order.'

<sup>8</sup> A conclusion that Seigel accepts: 'Those of us who do not believe that such a third moment of selfhood will ever arrive must content ourselves with the incomplete modes of being selves to ourselves' (Seigel 2005, p.103).

<sup>9</sup> Martin and Barresi 2000, p.29.

a corner and is using an appeal to the supernatural to get him out of it, so too Kierkegaard can be read as saying something similar. On this reading of Locke, his point is simply that while the account of identity he proposes has clear limits and deficiencies, it's *good enough* for us as beings trying to live lives that will be found worthy in that eschatological scheme of things. We cannot, ultimately, know what we will be judged for, but we have an account of identity that is plenty to be going on with.

Likewise, Kierkegaard might say that while his view of selfhood doesn't yield any sort of decision procedure for working out boundary cases, most of our morally freighted human identity is not in question most of the time. Where the diachronic person begins and ends may well be hard to discern. I've often referred in this book to what we are to appropriate as ourselves as a 'human' identity or the identity that maps onto the career of a human animal. But even if we wanted to specify that when Anti-Climacus says *menneske*, for instance, he means something perfectly co-extensive with the life of one specific human animal, the boundaries in such cases can still be unclear, may involve problem cases where different perspectives come into conflict (such as false memory), and might involve genuine puzzles about imputability and agency.<sup>10</sup> Some of these problems are arguably more serious than a 'theological pragmatist' position would allow, and might genuinely benefit from metaphysical investigation, or at least careful philosophical description and exploration of the various forms of continuity and discontinuity involved. But existentially, and first-personally, there is plenty within our life-world that's non-problematic for each of us to appropriate to ourselves.

This pragmatic point also sits within Kierkegaard's larger concern to avoid using knotty intellectual problems as a means of sidestepping practical responsibility. For example, as Paul Muench argues, much of what Climacus is doing in the *Postscript* is trying to slow his over-eager philosophical reader down, to show us that the fundamental tasks of our life are not things we can simply carry out without further ado and then move on to more intellectually challenging problems. Some tasks *remain* tasks, and should properly preoccupy us for an entire lifetime.<sup>11</sup> In *For Self-Examination*, Kierkegaard claims that when reading scripture, with all the ethical demands it makes of us, we are enjoined to actualize what we *do* understand of it rather than spend time trying to decipher the bits we *don't* understand. There are, in Kierkegaard's view, important 'upbuilding' reasons to avoid giving too precise a specification of where our responsibilities begin and end, because doing so will pander to our all-too-human desire for evasion and relief, showing us loopholes and avenues of escape—including distracting ourselves with the very activity of determining the limits of our responsibility! In the same way, Kierkegaard's final word on our eschatological identity, were he to supply one, might be this: just repent of

<sup>10</sup> As an example, consider the question of contemporary responsibility for historical injustices.

<sup>11</sup> Muench 2011.

everything you see to repent for, and one day you will ‘know even as [you are] known’ (1 Corinthians 13:12). Philosophically this is rather unsatisfying; but there’s no reason to think that the imperatives of philosophical inquiry and of ethical practice can never be in tension.<sup>12</sup>

Not surprisingly, there is an element of faith in all this. Ayers notes that ‘Locke’s Christian believes that somehow the world will eventually turn out to be a morally more straightforward place than our everyday experiences of forgetting might suggest’,<sup>13</sup> and likewise the Kierkegaardian believer hopes, in Tamara Monet Marks’ phrase, for a ‘disambiguated creation’,<sup>14</sup> a state which cannot be fulfilled in time.<sup>15</sup> Yet it is in some ways a more modest view of identity-as-responsibility than we find elsewhere in the literature. It needn’t, for instance, lead to the Levinasian vision of a self that is an ever-expanding locus of responsibility and boundless guilt, the ‘I’ defined as ‘a point of the universe where such an overflow of responsibility is produced’,<sup>16</sup> for those who find such a view troubling. And acknowledging our ignorance of the precise boundaries of our responsibility—while accepting we *do* know a vast amount that clearly does fall within our field of responsibility—is truer to how we experience the world in practical terms. We may not be able to pin down exactly where our lives begin and end, where the border between what we are and are not answerable for lies; but we can nonetheless take responsibility for the whole, *whatever* its extension turns out to be.

## How Far Can Non-theists Go with Kierkegaard?

*Even if all that’s true, we’re still ignoring the elephant in the room: God. I don’t believe in anything that answers to the Abrahamic conception of Yaweh/God/Allah, and I don’t believe in the possibility of post-mortem survival such as would be required by Abrahamic eschatology. I suspect you don’t believe in these things either. Surely that makes everything you’ve said here moot?*

It’s certainly the case that non-theist readers cannot follow Kierkegaard all the way. And there is always a real danger of distorting Kierkegaard by using him outside the pervasively religious context of his thinking. Nonetheless, there is much in Kierkegaard that I think can be salvaged for non-theistic contexts, provided we are careful to distinguish between what we take to be Kierkegaard’s own view and applications of Kierkegaardian concepts. (Whether I have succeeded in exercising such care in this book is for others to judge). So, what of this soteriological account of personal

<sup>12</sup> Compare the Buddhist parable of a man wounded by a poisoned arrow, who refuses to have the arrow removed until he has been told the caste, age, occupation, birthplace, and motive of the person who shot him—regardless of whether his curiosity is warranted or not, he will die before he gets the answers he seeks (*Majjhima-nikaya*, 63; Nanamoli and Bodhi 1995, pp.534–5).

<sup>13</sup> Ayers 1991, p.272.

<sup>14</sup> Marks 2011, pp.282.

<sup>15</sup> On the central role of ‘eschatological hope’ in Kierkegaard, see Davenport 2008; 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Levinas 1969, p.245.

identity? If we reject Kierkegaard's theistic premises, what, if anything, survives? The familiar version of Genesis 4:8 is quite terse: Cain lures Abel into a field and murders him. In the Targum Neofiti (an Aramaic elaboration of the Hebrew Tanakh) however, Cain launches into a spontaneous atheistic lecture, telling his brother that 'There is no Judgement, there is no Judge, there is no other world, there is no gift of good reward for the just and no punishment for the wicked.' Abel insists there *is* such a judge, and is promptly dispatched to meet him.<sup>17</sup> For those of us who suspect Cain was on the right side of the theological argument at least, what could, or should, be salvaged from Kierkegaard's phenomenology of temporally bivalent self-experience if there is no judge and no world to come?

I think the key here is to be found in the curiously passive nature of final judgement, as noted in *The Sickness Unto Death*:

Essentially, everyone arrives in eternity bringing along with him and delivering his own absolutely accurate record of every least trifle he has committed or omitted. Thus a child could hold court in eternity; there is really nothing for a third party to do, everything down to the most insignificant word spoken is in order. (SUD, 124/SKS 11, 235)

This image of a written record of the deceased's soteriological status is well attested in Abrahamic faiths, from the Book of Jubilees 5:13's 'And the judgement of all is ordained and written on the heavenly tablets in righteousness', to Revelation 20:12's 'And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works',<sup>18</sup> to Surah 17:30–1 of the Qur'an: 'And [for] every person We have fastened his fate upon his own neck, and We will produce for him on the Day of Resurrection a record which he will encounter spread open. [It will be said], "Read your record. Sufficient is yourself against you this Day as accountant."' <sup>19</sup> The last example suggests a more comprehensive recording, in which a person's entire life, not just their election or damnation, is recorded—the 'every idle word' of Matthew 12:36 which Kierkegaard stresses again and again.

What's interesting, and what the quote from *Sickness* above brings out, is that in such a scenario the judge is in one sense superfluous, for the written record *already* condemns the deceased. The book simply says whatever it says, independent of any judgements made about it. This is equally clear in an even older image of post-mortem judgement: the *psychostasia* or the weighing of souls to determine their soteriological status. This image goes back as far as the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*,

<sup>17</sup> McNamara 1992, p.67.

<sup>18</sup> Compare the thirteenth-century hymn *Dies Irae*: 'Liber scriptus proferetur | In quo totum continetur | Unde mundus iudicetur' ('The written book will be brought forth | In which all is contained | From which the world shall be judged.')

<sup>19</sup> See also Surah 10:61 'And you are not (engaged) in any affair, nor do you recite concerning it any portion of the Qur'an, nor do you do any work but We are witnesses over you when you enter into it, and there does not lie concealed from your Lord the weight of an atom in the earth or in the heaven, nor any thing less than that nor greater, but it is in a clear book.'

which depicts the deceased's heart being weighed on a scale against the feather of Ma'at, symbolizing truth, while similar depictions of souls being weighed against some (morally loaded) standard, or the deceased's good and bad deeds being weighed against each other, occur in Vedic literature,<sup>20</sup> Shinto,<sup>21</sup> the Qur'an,<sup>22</sup> and Medieval Christian artistic depictions of the last judgement, in which the Archangel Michael is often shown carrying out this role.<sup>23</sup> Yet *psychostasia* is here presented as not so much a *judgement* of the dead as an impersonal measurement. There is, as S. G. F. Brandon noted, a tension in such an eschatological scene between the 'impersonal and automatic' operation of these scales and the notion of trial, defence, and judgement.<sup>24</sup> The 'judge' does not decide any facts of the matter, but simply certifies the verdict and applies punishment or reward. The soteriological status of the deceased is therefore not dependent upon any decision on the judge's part.

I think we can see in all this where something might be recoverable for non-believers. What all these judgement myths have in common is a soteriological focus on the *final whole-life status* of the deceased. In each case, the deceased arrives with her fate already sealed: her life was whatever it was, and its value or disvalue as a whole is now forever fixed. At death, it is too late to change this total evaluation of a life—which is why the mechanism of 'judgement' is presented as operating in an automatic and impersonal way. The contents and final meaning of a life can no longer be changed. This, as commentators such as Rudd and Davenport have noted, is one of the key meanings of death for Kierkegaard: the point at which the meaning of my life is fixed once and for all, and where no further possibilities for making amends are available. And that is a thought we can make sense of, and find compelling, even without a belief in posthumous survival or final divine judgement. We do have a concern for the ultimate value of our lives as a whole, the sort of thing we are concerned about when we ask questions like 'If I died right now, would it all have been worth it?' We have a way of caring about the totality of our life, of its value or disvalue (including and perhaps especially in moral terms) that has a particular

<sup>20</sup> *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*: XI 2, 7, 33 'Now, as to that balance, the right (south) edge of the Vēdi. Whatever good deed man does that is inside the Vēdi; and whatever evil deed he does that is outside the Vēdi. Let him therefore sit down, touching the right edge of the Vēdi; for, indeed, they place him on the balance in yonder world; and whichever of the two will rise that he will follow, whether it be the good or the evil. And, verily, whosoever knows this, mounts the balance even in this world, and escapes being placed on the balance in yonder world; for his good deed rises, and not his evil deed.' Thanks to Leesa Davis for her assistance with this quote.

<sup>21</sup> The judgement of the deceased before Emma-Ô, judge of the dead, involved *both* a comprehensive written record and the use of scales. Cf. Brandon 1967, p.191.

<sup>22</sup> Surah 21:47 'We shall set up scales of justice for the day of Judgment, so that not a soul will be dealt with unjustly in the least. And if there be (no more than) the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it (to account): and enough are We to take account.'

<sup>23</sup> Brandon 1967, pp.120–6.

<sup>24</sup> Brandon 1967, pp.24, 32. As Brandon notes, there were two, seemingly incompatible strands within the Egyptian funerary texts: the automatic, impersonal weighing of the heart, and the deceased's personal declaration of innocence before judges. It could be argued that something of the same tension attends the later Jewish, Christian, and Muslim eschatologies as well.

final status as the object of its concern. The significance of that status doesn't turn on what, if anything, follows afterwards.

And thus, as Rudd puts it, a non-believer can 'take the thought of looking back on our lives from eternity as a sort of regulative ideal'<sup>25</sup> and still find meaning and significance in it, without believing there will be any punishment or reward for having lived in a certain way. John H. Whittaker makes a very similar point, which bears quoting in full:

We get some idea of what the eternal might mean as an absolute notion because we all know that a time is coming when we will have no more time, when the opportunity for change, improvement, growth, etc. will have passed. When that moment comes, our earthly lives will be over and we will changelessly (i.e. eternally) be what we have been, since the whole span of our lives will then be caught in the irrevocableness of the past. Thinking about ourselves from this point of view, we want to know what our lives will have amounted to when they are completed wholes. What will we have been when the time to change has passed? There is something of the eternal in such reflections because the judgments that we pass on ourselves from this perspective loom with the absoluteness of unchangeable verdicts.

That is why Kierkegaard follows Christian practice in speaking of the eternal as a judge who comes to separate the just from the unjust. It is not so much that there is a *being* who will judge us, or that there is a particular day of judgment that will come; it is only that the spectre of an unwelcome finality looms over our own self-assessment. One does not have to believe in Christianity to know what this means.<sup>26</sup>

In caring about the ultimate significance of the lives we lead, we care about a final status that gathers together our lives as an implicitly finished totality in the same way as we find in the ancient imagery of the psychostasia and the Book of Life. Of course, things are different for believers: for a start, believing in the reality of punishment or the possibility of forgiveness and mercy may give radically different significance to the thought of such a final status. And yet the idea of caring about such a status does seem to be perfectly intelligible from the perspective of non-belief. Hence something of the concern that motivates Kierkegaard to try and bridge the gap between objective awareness of human continuity and subjective appropriation of our lives can survive even in non-theistic discussions of these issues. If we care about the whole of our lives in this deep, unifying way, we don't need the thought of punishment or reward to care about whether our lives will ultimately have been of value.

## Conclusion: Where Next?

We started this book with a dispiriting picture of a field of inquiry that is becoming ever more fragmented. The metaphysical discussion of personal identity, for all its value, seems to be simply grinding further into an ever more complex stalemate.

<sup>25</sup> Rudd 2012, p.166.

<sup>26</sup> Whittaker 2000, pp.194–5.



As C. Stephen Evans puts it, 'Kierkegaard's understanding of selfhood points us beyond this argument between metaphysical and interpretivist theories.'<sup>27</sup> In particular, as I've tried to show here, Kierkegaard suggests that we should see selfhood not simply as an objective metaphysical matter—a question about a class of objects called 'persons' and how long they last—but about how a temporally perspectival first-person subject relates to the totality of a human life. That is not simply a metaphysical question. Enticingly, though, it's not simply a phenomenological one either. Rather it calls us to notice how first-person perspectives interact with the deliverances of metaphysics, of how subjects relate to psychological, physical, and social (dis-)continuity. Consider a relatively simple, prosaic example: you and I are reminiscing about times past, and discussing, let's say, a particularly memorable party. You tell a heart-warming story about how you met the love of your life, Cordelia, at that party. But I then point out that Cordelia couldn't have been at *that* party, because it took place during the year when she was living overseas. In this simple vignette we see various forms of continuity and identification all intersecting. The continuity of your memory is called into question, while your narrative understanding of your life is problematized by the narratives of others (revealing, thereby, the crucial intersubjective dimension of narrative selfhood), narratives which in turn involve facts about physical and spatio-temporal continuity (namely, where your body and Cordelia's body were in space during that period of time).

The temptation here is simply to fold everything into a single set of objective facts that settle any questions of identity that may be in play here: your memory is simply wrong, as Cordelia couldn't have been at that party. But as we've seen, a single account of the metaphysics of personal identity that answers to all our core intuitions here has proven elusive, particularly when it comes to capturing the importance of the first-person perspective. What's more productive, more philosophically interesting, and truer to our lived experience of selfhood, is to turn our attention to the ways in which the different identity claims figured in such a scenario interact; how the objective and subjective inform, colour, and modify each other.

Making predictions is something of a mug's game, but I'd suggest this turn to how perspectives interact is the direction in which discussions of personal identity, with their increasingly apparent differentiation between 'selves' and 'persons', needs to move. Instead of trying to collapse everything we care about in identity into a unitary, objective account of something called *the* self, we need to attend, using all the tools at our disposal, to the ways in which irreducibly first-personal elements of identity interact with objective elements. What this engagement with Kierkegaard has allowed us to see is that selfhood may be an *achievement* on the part of a present-tense subject as it interrelates these various kinds of identity-claims—and, in a way that perhaps Locke

<sup>27</sup> Evans 2006, p.265.

would have approved of, he does this in a way that's fundamentally normative. Metaphysics becomes the handmaiden of ethics, not the other way around.

So Kierkegaard, perhaps to the surprise of some, turns out to be a useful guide in showing Anglophone philosophers of identity a way out of the metaphysical thicket they've found themselves in over the last half-century. Not everyone can or will want to follow Kierkegaard all the way down his thoroughly eschatologized path. Martin Buber once wrote of Kierkegaard that 'We have much to learn from him, but not the final lesson'.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps so. But as Robert Nozick said, 'There is room for words on subjects other than last words'.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Buber 2007, p.65.

<sup>29</sup> Nozick 1974, p.xii.



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