

**THE PROBLEM AND THE CURE: *MIMESIS* IN SØREN KIERKEGAARD'S
SECOND AUTHORSHIP**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Søren Kierkegaard's engagements with *mimesis* in the writings of his so-called "second authorship." The project is the first systematic and comprehensive treatment of the theme of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard's thought from the period of his authorship that stretches from 1847 to 1855. It is during this time that Kierkegaard exhibits an increasing interest in, and articulates a complex critique of, various dimensions of *mimesis*. Kierkegaard's reading of *mimesis* is dialectical. On the one hand, he perceives *mimesis* as problematic, but on the other hand, he finds it valuable and "useful" in describing the human condition; hence, my title: "The Problem and the Cure."

Accordingly, my dissertation argues for four main theses. First, Kierkegaard offers a profoundly mimetic reading of both human nature and the world they inhabit. Second, he offers a unique rendering of *mimesis* that is indirect, intention-driven, "refigurative," and in a certain sense "non-imitative." Third, my thesis demonstrates that Kierkegaard employs a wide range of facets of *mimesis*, including imitation, representation and emulation both in the substance and form of his religious and non-religious, signed and pseudonymous works. Lastly, I show that Kierkegaard participated in the ongoing discussion of *mimesis* among his contemporaries and formulated an account of the concept that may broaden, complement, but also challenge the way it is conceived in contemporary debates.

These theses, implicitly and explicitly, oppose the customary readings of Kierkegaard in this area. The first of these is that Kierkegaard's employment of *mimesis* is deeply "unintentional" and largely limited to his consideration of imitation in his accounts of the imitation of Christ. A second prevailing view that my reading challenges is that the Dane took no part in the scholarly discussions concerning *mimesis* with his contemporaries and that his understanding of imitation is idiosyncratic and can be comprehended adequately solely, so to speak, on its own terms. Finally, I dispute the widespread view that imitation in Kierkegaard is a strictly religious notion and that reading his appraisal of the imitation of Christ from the perspective of *mimesis* is problematic and misleading.

In opposing such widespread views, and in proposing an alternative account rooted in Kierkegaard's own texts, I argue that the category of *mimesis* offers a

compelling lens through which Kierkegaard's "second authorship" might be productively understood.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Theses

In short, the principal thesis of this work is that Kierkegaard employs *mimesis* in his “second authorship” in such a way that it acquires a unique shape. He extracts and explores several facets of *mimesis*, such as imitation, representation, performance and enactment, and “utilizes” the phenomenon in question in both the substance and form of his religious and non-religious, and signed and pseudonymous works. This contention contrasts with the prevailing interpretation of imitation in Kierkegaard that does not identify *mimesis* as central to its understanding. Although this is (often) not explicitly stated in such interpretations, the view that emerges from them suggests that Kierkegaard’s employment of *mimesis* is deeply “unintentional” and in large part limited to his account of the imitation of Christ.¹

According to the customary interpretation, reading Kierkegaard’s appraisal of the phenomenon of the imitation of Christ from the perspective of *mimesis* is problematic and misleading for several reasons. On this view, Kierkegaard’s interest in *mimesis* is remote, to say the least, and he does not participate in the discussion of it among his contemporaries. Moreover, his understanding of imitation, as scholars extensively argue, is idiosyncratic and can only be comprehended adequately on its own terms, so to speak. Finally, it is argued that imitation in Kierkegaard is a religious notion and as such is necessarily independent from, or opposed to the (supposedly principally) *aesthetic* notion of *mimesis*. This dissertation will put forward and defend four theses in order to challenge such views.

First, Kierkegaard renders human being as (generally and specifically) a mimetic creature. In Kierkegaard, the self is mimetic and the task of becoming oneself, as well as the “space” in which such becoming takes place, are essentially qualified by *mimesis*. This means that Kierkegaard’s take on imitation cannot be limited to

¹ Good examples of that approach are Julia Watkin’s entry “Imitation” in her *The A to Z of Kierkegaard’s Philosophy*, Lanhan: The Scarecrow Press 2010, p. 128; Leo Stan, “Imitation,” *Kierkegaard’s Concepts*, t. III, *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 15, ed. by Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald and Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2014, pp. 203-7; Jamie Lorentzen’s appraisal of imitation in his *Kierkegaard’s Metaphors*, Macon: Mercer University Press 2001 pp. 153-7; David J. Gouwens’s remark on the problem in his *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, pp. 127-8; and Peder Jothen’s accounts of *mimesis* limited to “never-ending striving to imitate Christ’s life,” or mimetic capacities as “enable[ing] a self to redouble Christ’s image as one’s life form” from his *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood: The Art of Subjectivity*, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2014, p. 49 and p. 240 respectively.

“following after” Christ, the phenomenon of which meaning is embedded in the etymology of the Danish term for imitation, namely *Efterfølgelse*. Rather it must be situated in relation to notions of identity, authenticity, human becoming, acting according to a model, and the phenomena of comparison and fashion. Moreover, any discussion of imitation in Kierkegaard necessarily entails other aspects of *mimesis*, such as its representational and emulative dimensions; imitating Christ, for Kierkegaard, involves both representing and emulating him.

Second, as the title of this thesis suggests, Kierkegaard reads *mimesis* dialectically². Apart from the “mere” fact that *mimesis* deeply qualifies the human self’s being and becoming in the world, it is both a problem and a cure for Kierkegaard. The problem lies in that *mimesis* harbours the twin danger of merging into either an adequate or a fraudulent representation of an action (or object). The former is a slavish type of *mimesis* that amounts to copying and comparison and as such produces a detailed representation of an action (or object) that does not differ from what it represents. The latter is akin to mimicking and pretending and as such is a premeditated deviation from the “original,” which both refrains from acknowledging the difference between itself and the original and passes itself off as an adequate representation. Following Plato, among others, Kierkegaard finds such imitation unethical, dishonest and base, rather than ethical, honest and virtuous. By contrast, *mimesis* is understood as a cure insofar as it is concerned with the intention that stands behind the represented action (or object) and in this way often admittedly goes beyond what it represents, hence, it is essentially emulative. This positive type of imitation in Kierkegaard is intention-driven and indirect, but also dynamic and open for interpretation. It is also “non-imitative” in a moral sense, because it defies deceiving, pretending, misrepresenting or just passing oneself as another. Moreover, Kierkegaard finds mimetic formation problematic when it is based on comparison, and he identifies the cure to this problem in *mimesis* qualified by difference. Becoming like someone is opposed to becoming “like oneself,” which is only possible when the absolutely different is taken as the point of departure.

Third, Kierkegaard’s authorship is mimetic in its structure and composition. It employs multiple and multifaceted means of representation that aim at both representing the author and communicating with the reader, where especially the

latter entails a hermeneutics of enactment and performance. Moreover, Kierkegaard engages several mimetic tools and techniques such as *ekphrasis*, and *eikastic* and *fantastic* types of *mimesis*. Not only this, the modes of conceptualizing, theorizing and self-expression operative in his work involve adhering to models, image-making (mental images), as well as the use of parables, fictional stories, autobiography and pseudonyms.

Last but not least, Kierkegaard contributes to the ongoing discussion of the status of *mimesis* among his contemporaries by philosophically addressing human autonomy, the significance of genius, modern aesthetics, religious art and Christianity. By positioning Kierkegaard's texts within a broader philosophical-historical context, I identify their implicit and explicit references to Plato, Aristotle, various theoreticians and practitioners of *imitatio Christi*, and his early and late contemporaries such as Kant, Lessing, Hegel and Adler. I also demonstrate that his writings "anticipate" modern appropriations of *mimesis*, such as Girard's conception of mimetic desire and Ricoeur's concept of figuration.

2. Conceptual remarks

The concept of *mimesis* is difficult to pinpoint. Since its conceptual formulation in the dialogues of Plato, it has carried different connotations depending on the period and context.³ Moreover, individual thinkers do not have one specific understanding of *mimesis*, rather they appraise it in diverse ways. For example, in the *Republic*, Plato recommends avoiding *mimesis* as it seduces gullible people into mistaking appearance for reality and effectively undermines the social fabric of the ideal polis. Yet in *Laws* he appraises *mimesis* positively and even recommends it—*mimesis* underwrites the structure of the ideal state, as the successful functioning of the state is based on imitation, appropriation and implementation of the prototypical modes of existence guided by virtue, honesty and nobility.⁴

No translation of the term into any vernacular is capable of exhausting or securing its multivocal meaning; it can designate "emulation, mimicry, dissimulation, doubling, theatricality, realism, identification, correspondence, depiction,

³ Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis*, transl. by Don Reneau, Berkely and Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 1995, p. 31, and Matthew Potolsky, *Mimesis*, New York and London, Routledge 2006, pp. 1-2.

⁴ Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 32.

verisimilitude, resemblance,”⁵ but also similarity, appearance, illusion and education or development.⁶ Furthermore, *mimesis* qualifies the distinction between real and unreal, original and copy, true and untrue, ethical and unethical, similarity and distortion, but it also enables one to discern the difference between a noble person and an imposter.⁷ Lastly, it pertains to different disciplines and has both individual and social dimensions: “Mimesis makes it possible for individuals to step out of themselves, to draw the outer world into their inner world, and to lend expression to their interiority.”⁸ Thus *mimesis* configures different worlds—internal and external, but also symbolic and figurative—and makes the relation between them possible.

My approach to *mimesis* draws primarily on Stephen Halliwell. I take into account the three main facets of *mimesis* that he identifies, namely, imitation, representation, and enactment (emulation or performance), all of which are both visual and behavioural.⁹ This threefold approach to *mimesis* is pertinent to the way it is operative in Kierkegaard.¹⁰ Subsequently, when referring to *mimesis* both in Kierkegaard and in general, I am not referring to imitation or any other of its particular facets, rather I am addressing it in a broad sense that encompasses these three aspects. According to that principle and the first two theses of my dissertation, a comprehensive understanding of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard must not reduce it to the phenomenon of imitation.

Following William Schweiker, I call *mimesis* in Kierkegaard existential. I agree with Schweiker’s assessment that the Kierkegaardian self is fundamentally characterized by *mimesis* in the sense that it is an enacting, interpretative and

⁵ Potolsky, *Mimesis*, p. 1.

⁶ Gebauer, Wulf, *Mimesis*, pp. 31-44.

⁷ *Ibid.* 1-8.

⁸ *Ibid.* 2.

⁹ Stephen Halliwell, *Mimesis and the History of Aesthetics*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2002, p. 15. In fact, Halliwell enumerates five categories of *mimesis*, of which I consider visual resemblance, behavioural imitation and emulation, and enactment: “first, visual resemblance (including figurative works of art); second, behavioral emulation/ imitation; third, impersonation, including dramatic enactment; fourth, vocal or musical production of significant or expressive structures of sound; fifth, metaphysical conformity, as in the Pythagorean belief, reported by Aristotle, that the material world is a mimesis of the immaterial domain of numbers.”

¹⁰ This approach is both pertinent to Kierkegaard’s *mimesis* and problematic in light of his rendering of the concept. While Halliwell argues that the common thread for these different rendering of *mimesis* is a certain idea of similarity, Kierkegaard’s rendering of the concept aims at redefining *mimesis* as non-likeness or as entailing difference as its decisive component. Moreover, he both rehabilitates the copy as fully valuable and complete and re-defines the original as historical and imaginary. See *Ibid.* “The common thread running through these otherwise various uses is an idea of correspondence or equivalence—correspondence between mimetic works, activities, or performances and their putative real-world equivalents, whether the latter are taken to be externally given and independent or only hypothetically projectable from the mimetic works themselves.”

decision-making self. Kierkegaardian selfhood, as existentially mimetic, is also fundamentally relational—in this I also follow Schweiker. Existential *mimesis* in Kierkegaard is by necessity the self's practical response to “the power beyond the domain of human desire”¹¹ within prescribed “configurations of possible ways of existing.”¹²

My understanding of existential *mimesis* in Kierkegaard, however, also differs from Schweiker's in important respects. First, on my reading *mimesis* has a broad range of aspects. For Schweiker, the self “has a continuity only through existential *mimesis*...[and] exists *only* in its specific acts of decision and enactment, a movement in and out of presence.”¹³ In that sense, Schweiker does not take into account the self as an image-maker; thus he does not characterize the self as mimetically structured as such and provides little analysis of Kierkegaard's rendering of mimetic objects and the relationship between them and their subject, the mimetic self. Moreover, my account differs from Schweiker's to the extent that I read existential *mimesis* as informed by both Christian and non-Christian traditions. I identify the latter in Kierkegaard's appropriation of the Socratic dimension of existential *mimesis*—discussed in Chapter Two.

I read existential *mimesis* as “refigurative,” as well as indirect, intention-driven, and “non-imitative.” My understanding of *mimesis* as “non-imitative” draws on J. Tate's appraisal of imitation in Plato's *Republic*.¹⁴ The main idea I take from Tate is that imitation can only be undertaken in a true manner by an ethical, virtuous and honest figure, because imitation has the power to seduce us into thinking that we can be anything we want to be, and a base, dishonest and unethical person will gladly pass herself off as another person, not by mistake, but wilfully. If in that sense “making oneself as another” is imitative, the guardians must limit themselves to undertaking a “restricted” type of “non-imitative imitation.”

However, understood in this way, *mimesis* is concerned with an adequate, and often detailed, imitation, but also representation and enactment of a model or an action. Thus, Kierkegaard's reading of this type of *mimesis* is dialectical and ambivalent. As we will see in Chapter Two, on the one hand, he is sympathetic to the moral dimension of imitation in Plato, as it emphasizes the relationship between the

¹¹ William Schweiker, *Mimetic Reflections*, New York: Fordham University Press 1990, p. 184.

¹² *Ibid.* 204.

¹³ *Ibid.* 169.

¹⁴ J. Tate, “‘Imitation’ in Plato's *Republic*,” *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1928, p. 16-23.

mimetic nature of human beings and responsibility. On the other hand, *mimesis* concerned with detailed representation disagrees with Kierkegaard's understanding of the concept as dynamic and interpretative, and as allowing for going beyond the represented model or action. Moreover, as I show in Chapter One, understanding *mimesis* in Kierkegaard only in this Platonic sense as both virtuous and unadulterated falls short of the actual breadth of his conception of the imitation of Christ and results in multiple shortcomings and problems. For example, a strictly Platonic view of *mimesis* cannot properly account for the degree of similarity of *mimesis*—it does not distinguish between less and more adequate representations. With respect to Christ's divine nature, Platonic *mimesis* does not explain *what* precisely in Christ's life and character is to be imitated, represented, or enacted.

The “refigurative” dimension of *mimesis*, which is hinted at in Plato's *Republic*, is developed at length by Aristotle and, in a contemporary setting, in the works of Ricoeur. *Mimesis* so understood is both “copying and changing in one,”¹⁵ and thus the imitator deviates from detailed representation, striving rather for perfection. Representation is never the original, and should not aspire to be just that. For example, in imitating Christ we become simultaneously like-and-unlike Him, since we can never be like-and-(paradoxically)-unlike him. As Schweiker suggests, “refigurative” *mimesis* requires action and demands interpretation, understood in the sense we find it exposed in Ricoeur's thought. I elaborate this rendering of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard in the last two chapters of the present work.

Imitation understood as “refigurative” is not without its glitches. How does one know that what is taking place is *mimesis*? What are the means of measuring its success? How can we distinguish “refigurative” *mimesis* from a mere distortion or simulation?

As the solution to such problems, I propose to consider *mimesis* in Kierkegaard as indirect and intention-driven. It is a type of *mimesis* that is not concerned with a detailed representation of an action or a model, but with the intention that stands behind them. I believe that *mimesis* understood in this manner meets some of the difficulties and shortcomings offered by scholars in the field; difficulties which will be signaled in more detail in Chapter One. Kierkegaard's reading of the imitation of Christ is indirect and intention-driven, since it is not

¹⁵ Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 56.

concerned with a detailed imitation, representation or enactment of Christ's "prefigured" actions, but rather with *mimesis* of the intention of his incarnational presence on Earth, that is, Christ's obedience to his Father. Furthermore, the indirect and intention-driven *mimesis* does not challenge or disagree with "the non-imitative style" of *mimesis* undertaken by a virtuous and ethical agent, nor with the "refigurative" *mimesis* calling for enactment and interpretation, but greatly complements and embraces them.

Mimesis so rendered entails a specific mimetic object, which I call a mimetic model. I qualify the model as mimetic to emphasize its comprehensive mimetic dimension, which surpasses mere imitation. A *mimetic model* is then much more than an *imitative model*, because it kindles and challenges the imitator to transcend, interpret and lastly differ from it in the mimetic act. In his authorship, Kierkegaard engages several mimetic models, which, apart from Christ who holds a prominent role in this context, I classify into internal and external. The unique composition of all of these mimetic models problematizes the issue of actualization of the idea of being a Christian in Kierkegaard. Several perplexing issues rise when considering Christ as the prototype. For instance, how can a human being imitate the paradoxical unity of God-man? Which elements of Christ should one imitate to be a Christian? How does the imitation of Christ, who is not a Christian himself, make one into a Christian?

By means of addressing these and similar problems (flagged and commented upon in the first two chapters), I will show that, contrary to the intuition offered by scholars who emphasize particular features of Christ's human nature that need to be imitated, the solution lies in an understanding of the type of imitation involved. Putting it differently, instead of refining the object of imitation, the Christ-image, the emphasis should be placed on a comprehensive understanding of the type of imitation at stake, which I claim to be indirect, intention-driven, "refigurative" and "non-imitative."

Lastly, by referring to Kierkegaard's dialectic or the dialectical property of a concept, I mean two interrelated things. As for the former, Kierkegaard's dialectic is characterized by a reasoning that seeks to hold together in tension opposing qualities of an investigated idea. An example of that is the dialectical pair of thinking and being. Kierkegaard does not collapse one into the other, nor does he subordinate one to the other, nor does he transform the pair into a different "unifying" and "singular" quality. The dialectical character of an object or notion stresses that, putting it in the

words of Wittgenstein, “things which look the same are really different;”¹⁶ this approach emphasizes complexity of analyzed ideas, making sure that they are comprehensively accounted for. Hence, “dialectical” suggests paradoxical, heterogeneous, irreconcilable, but also several-fold, indirect, mediated.

3. Linguistic remarks

While I concentrate my investigation on sources available in English-speaking academia (I am aware this parameter may influence a study of a Danish thinker in light of a concept coined in the ancient Greek), I extensively consult the key Danish mimetic terms and some potential difficulties they entail; I also provide references to Danish editions of Kierkegaard’s works.¹⁷ Fundamental to a thorough investigation of Kierkegaard’s engagement with *mimesis* is an understanding of the way in which he employs the term “imitation,” especially viewed in the light of its etymology.

The key Danish term for imitation in this context is *Efterfølgelse*. It has its origin in the Danish translation of the Latin term *imitatio*—itself the translation of *mimesis* coined in the ancient Greek—and is used for instance in the title of the Danish editions of Thomas à Kempis’ *De imitatione Christi*.¹⁸

“The Dictionary of the Danish Language” situates *Efterfølgelse* predominantly in the Christian tradition that portrays Christ as the ideal and example for imitation. The term literally translates into English “following after,” and it is the most often used mimetic term by the Danish thinker. As I will show in Chapter One, the etymological and conceptual approach to *Efterfølgelse* and a particular religious perspective on the concept strongly determined its understanding in the context of Kierkegaard’s engagement with *imitatio Christi* of the *devotio moderna* or the Scriptures. Conceptualized in this manner, imitation is believed to be distinguished from Plato’s or Aristotle’s renderings of *mimesis*, which are likely acknowledged as obscuring the dynamics of Kierkegaard’s *Efterfølgelse*. Consequently, as some

¹⁶ David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, p. 18

¹⁷ *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter (SKS)*, vols. 1-28, vols. K1-K28, ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Anne Mette Hansen, and Johnny Kondrup et al., Copenhagen: Gads Forlag 1997–2013. When the relevant text has not appeared in *SKS* I cite *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, ed. P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr, E. Torsting, Niels Thulstrup, and Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1909–48; 1968–70; 1975–78.

¹⁸ *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, vols. 1–28, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1918–56, vol. 4, columns 140–1.

scholars emphasize, the existential dimension of Kierkegaard's *Efterfølgelse* is utterly incompatible with the rendering of imitation formed in the classics.

What may seem surprising is that Kierkegaard uses a variety of terms referring to the broad mimetic sphere in his corpus such as *Ligne* [likeness and to liken to resemble], *Efterligne* and *Efterligning* [likeness and likening], *Lighed* [compare], *Sammenligning* [comparison], *Eftergjøre* [going and doing after], *Efterabelse* [aping or parroting], *mimisk* [mimic or mimical], but also *Fordoblelse* [redoubling], *Reduplikation* [reduplication], *Dobbelt-Reflexion* [double-reflection], *Dobbelthed* [doubleness or duplexity], *Dobbelt-Bevægelse* [double-movement], *Billede* [image or picture] and *Forbillede* [prototype, model, type, pattern].¹⁹

Most of these terms will be considered more closely in the present work. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, the majority of these notions have certain mimetic qualities of doubleness and “referentiality” built into them. For example, when we compare, we compare something with something else. Likewise, likeness makes reference to something outside of itself. In a similar manner, doing-after-someone refers to “a someone;” and reduplication is a new instance of something other.

Moreover, a key element here is to understand Kierkegaard's use of image and prototype, and the unique relationship between the two. The English translation of *Forbillede* as “prototype” seems to be problematic, contrary to its translation into “pattern.” Prototype denotes something primary but not fully valuable, like a preliminary model of something. Often, we associate prototype with a means of testing before we devise something on a large scale or in a more complete form. In Danish *Forbillede* includes *Billede*, but it seems that the word “type” in English already denotes what we understand as *Forbillede*. This could mean that prototype is no more than a type. The usage of “pattern” seems more promising as it does not suggest an improvement upon Christ and His work, renders Him complete and whole; it also corresponds with Kierkegaard's metaphor for imitation as an act of walking and following in someone's footsteps (following after a prototype seems recondite and less intuitive).

¹⁹ See for instance Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press 1970, p. 335, entry 1879 (SKS 24, 14; NB 21:9), where several mimetic terms are used in a short passage.

However, if we consider image as already a representation of something other, a more nuanced meaning appears to be at work in *Billede-Forbillede*. This is to say that prototype becomes a form of super-representation, which as such incorporates or entails a variety of types. One finds an interesting case that exemplifies that state of affairs in the theological discussion on the theory of christophany among the Church Fathers. In brief, some scholars believed that the Old Testament contains pre-incarnated appearances of Christ, which could be rendered as Christ-types. Augustine famously disagrees with that in his *De Trinitate*, believing that each christophany is a theophany (an appearance of the trinity as a whole at once, in contrast to an appearance of Christ as an image of God).

The issue with *Billede-Forbillede* reappears in Kierkegaard's engagement with the Scriptures, especially considered against the backdrop of the conceptual pair *imago Dei-imitatio Christi*. It would seem that the concept of *imago Dei* in the Old Testament (OT), according to which a human being is already an imitation of God, clashes with the concept of *imitatio Christi* in the New Testament (NT), according to which Jesus is the perfect image of God. The problem is how to reconcile the fact that we as human beings are already created in the image of God (OT paradigm) with the imitation of the "prototype" which sets the standard for the task of an appropriate imitation of God (NT paradigm). Moreover, the question is whether the imitation of Christ is an imitation of God or an imitation of the image of God.

As we will see in the following chapters, these concerns seep through Kierkegaard's late writings especially, challenging a stringent religious reading of his engagement with *mimesis*. This begs for a more comprehensive reading, which as such entails certain poetic, and therefore aesthetic, dimensions of his theological-philosophical deliberations.

Lastly, in my exposition of the role of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard, I will make reference to different ways in which the concept has been understood in the history of aesthetics, literature and philosophy. In this respect, I will predominantly refer to Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Ricoeur, and Girard. My main secondary sources in conceptualizing *mimesis* against the backdrop of its intellectual history are Gunter Gebauer's and Christop Wulf's *Mimesis*, Matthew Potolsky's *Mimesis*, Erich

Auerbach's *Mimesis*²⁰ and "Figura,"²¹ Stephen Halliwell's *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, and Frederick Burwick's *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections*.²²

4. Methodology

One already acquainted with Kierkegaard's thought would likely find it unsurprising to claim that he is a thinker difficult to pinpoint. His output varies from plays to novels and journal entries, from sermons and autobiography, to discourses and reviews. He published both under his own name and under pseudonyms, and some would argue, also underonyms and heteronyms.²³ The spectrum of Kierkegaard's intellectual engagement is vast. He participated in religious, ethical, literary, and theatrical discussions, and he also commented on politics, phenomena of modern urban life, music, poetry and vaudevilles.

A similar difficulty appears on the horizon of investigation when trying to conclusively define *mimesis*, the phenomenon, which by its very nature resists any cut-and-dry labelling or conclusive classification. *Mimesis* is so multifaceted that it pertains to various, often relatively unrelated fields and domains of thought and practice. We find it at work in a variety of disciplines—from the fields of humanities and neurosciences broadly speaking, to environmental studies, economics and studies of risk management.²⁴

Such a complex topology requires a note on research methodology. Although primarily a philosophical investigation, this thesis entails multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary aspects. First, several interrelated dimensions are present, such as argumentative, descriptive, analytic, evaluative, and historical. Second, I take into

²⁰ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, transl. by Willard R. Trask, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1974.

²¹ Eric Auerbach, "Figura," in his *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, transl. by Ralph Manheim, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1984, pp. 11-5.

²² Frederick Burwick, *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflection*, University Park: Penn State Press 2001.

²³ See for example Flemming Harrits, "On Kierkegaard's Literary Will," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 2010, pp. 253-66 and Joseph Westfall, *The Kierkegaardian Author: Authorship and Performance in Kierkegaard's Literary and Dramatic Criticism*, Berlin: De Gruyter 2007.

²⁴ See for example *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: An Interdisciplinary Approach. The Literary and Philosophical Debate*, vol. 1, ed. Mihai Spariosu, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company 1984; *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: An Interdisciplinary Approach. Mimesis, Semiosis and Power*, vol. 2, ed. Ronald Bogue, John Benjamins Publishing Company 1991; *Perspectives on Imitation: From Neuroscience to Social Science*, vol.1 *Mechanisms of Imitation and Imitation in Animals*, ed. Susan L. Hurley and Nick Chater, Cambridge and London: MIT Press 2005; and *Perspectives on Imitation. From Neuroscience to Social Science, Vol. 2, Imitation, Human Development, and Culture*, ed. Susan L. Hurley and Nick Chater, Cambridge and London: MIT Press 2005.

account and draw upon intellectual history, theology, literary studies, psychology and arts. The main argument of this work, which states that Kierkegaard's engagement with *mimesis* is very extensive, requires descriptive and analytic components. Putting it differently, a systematic presentation and analysis of Kierkegaard's understanding of *mimesis* constitutes a large part of the argument.

I do not merely state instances of Kierkegaard's engagement with *mimesis*, I evaluate them, especially in relation to the meanings this concept acquired throughout the movements of the history of philosophy. That is, following techniques of investigation exercised by intellectual historians, I consider the role of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard's writings against the backdrop of ongoing discussions of the phenomenon that stretches from Antiquity, through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, Kierkegaard's early and late contemporaries, to modern times. I show similarities and differences between the expositions of *mimesis* devised by Kierkegaard and his (assumed) interlocutors, whether acknowledged or not, in order to demonstrate possible inspiration and divergence from or reformulations of the same.

Christian theology is, of course, significant when it comes to revealing the various manners in which Kierkegaard employs the concept, not least for the following two reasons. First, the main point of departure for his consideration of *mimesis* is its Biblical rendering embedded in the Old Testament–New Testament tension of *imago Dei-imitatio Christi*. Second, Kierkegaard's participation in the conversation on *mimesis* is often part of his theological discourse, which as such greatly informs his understanding of the notion and every so often its implicit employment in his authorship.

Lastly, I give a detailed reading of his texts in dialogue with some critical aspects of literary theory.²⁵ In these close readings, I attempt to minimize any pretence to know what the author *really* meant, and rather focus on my interpretative role as a reader and pay attention to the mimetic structure of the texts, the mimetic tools and strategies engaged in it. Considering the mimetic nature of the problem, a great level of “suspicion” accompanies my appropriation of “how” Kierkegaard

²⁵ I especially consider Kierkegaard's writings engaging ideas developed by New Criticism, which “regards a literary text as an artifact or object with an existence of its own, independent of and *not necessarily* related to its author, its readers, the historical time it depicts, or the historical period in which it was written...a literary text is highly structured and contains its meaning in itself; it will reveal that meaning to a critic-reader who examines it on its own terms by applying a rigorous and systematic methodology.” Charles E. Bressler, *Literary Criticism*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall 2003, p. 182. Italics mine.

expects us to understand his production. Subsequently, I examine Kierkegaard's relation to his works and the relation between author-text-reader from the perspective of narratology and narrative studies.

5. Parameters

As the eponymous title of this research suggests, it focuses on Kierkegaard's so-called "second authorship," which designates the period of his writings that starts with the publication of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* in 1847 and ends with his death in 1855. In choosing to focus on Kierkegaard's "second authorship," I do not wish to imply that it is in any way more important than the "first authorship;" nor that it stands for the whole. Moreover, I do not claim that there is a deeper thematic consistency, or a lack of thereof, throughout either of the two parts of his authorship, or the authorship as a whole. The main reason for focusing on the "second authorship" period is, as scholars have observed, the fact that this is where Kierkegaard's engagement with mimetic themes primarily occurs.²⁶ The other reason for concentrating on his "second authorship" is more practical. A successful research on *mimesis*, a phenomenon as such very complex and multifaceted, in the whole of Kierkegaard's oeuvre, which spans 28 volumes (and includes almost 90 works, excluding journals, papers, and various notes) in the new critical Danish *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (SKS), would require a much greater time-frame and resources than currently at hand.

Unsurprisingly, this self-imposed limitation yields some pros and cons. First, my intention is to focus on less known works by Kierkegaard, both pseudonymous and signed. Reading them from the perspective of *mimesis*, I am able to hold up to view intricacies and highlight the sophistication of his authorship, but also to "rehabilitate" these texts in light of the more known works of Kierkegaard. I dedicate more time to mimetic concepts or aspects of Kierkegaard's authorship that have been so far largely ignored by scholars, such as the notions of redoubling, reduplication, double reflection, and the relationship between *mimesis* and his autobiographical and semiautobiographical entries.

²⁶ In this regard see: Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, "Historical Introduction," in Søren Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1998, p. xxiii; and C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009, pp. 191-93.

Although profoundly thought through, this is a “costly” move. By focusing on the second authorship, I pay considerably less attention to several fundamental mimetic facets of Kierkegaard’s production, such as the concept of repetition, the notions of imagination, reflection, and mirror(ing), and I do not consider at length his satire, comic and humor, remarks on theatre as forms of mimetic expression. Lastly, my dissertation does not consider the relation between text and formation in the context of the phenomenon of *Bildungsroman* and only suggests the moral dimension of Kierkegaard’s *mimesis* one finds in his mimetic ethics.

6. Structure

My dissertation consists of 5 chapters that are thematically organized around the three main facets of *mimesis*, namely imitation, representation and enactment. Chapter One, surveys the main academic renderings of Kierkegaard’s engagement with *mimesis*, and imitation in particular. Accordingly, scholars have framed the discussion of imitation in Kierkegaard by means of two main approaches: conceptualization and *imitatio Christi*. In terms of the former, I note senses in which the scholarship has gone in search of explicit uses of *mimesis* as a fixed concept in Kierkegaardian texts rather than doing the work of sensitively tracing and examining his varied conscious and unconscious employments of *mimesis* in his production.

The second common approach situates the discussion on *mimesis* almost solely in Kierkegaard’s religious thought, especially in his consideration of the phenomenon of the imitation of Christ. This take on to the subject limits the investigation to biblical scholarship and pietistic movements and, as such, obscures a more complete picture of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard. Moreover, it entails numerous shortcomings and are deeply problematic. Hence, this chapter demonstrates that the concept in question deserves a broader and more comprehensive approach, which I find by considering imitation in Kierkegaard in light of its mother concept, *mimesis*.

In undertaking such to understand Kierkegaard’s writings from a mimetic point of view, Chapter Two argues for two interrelated theses. First, I identify the mimetic structure that underlies imitation in Kierkegaard in terms of the phenomenon of acting in relation to a model. Contrary to the dominant reading that considers Christ as the only model, I demonstrate that in his writings Kierkegaard engages more

than one privileged mimetic model. In my formulation of a mimetic model I have recourse to works of Plato, Immanuel Kant, and Rene Girard.

Second, by demonstrating that Kierkegaard's conception of imitation as "following after" has a double origin, informed both by the biblical and non-biblical traditions, I argue for its Socratic dimension, thus opposing myself to an understanding of Kierkegaardian imitation as being of strictly Christian provenance. I show that the imitation one finds in Kierkegaard's works and in Plato's dialogues both entail the phenomenon of "following after" and a particularly understood "non-imitative imitation." Further, I demonstrate ways in which Kierkegaard considers himself a follower of Socrates' unique mimetic model.

In Chapter Three I focus on another dimension of Kierkegaard's *mimesis*, representation, which, as I demonstrate, is closely related to imitation. To examine his employment of representation, I analyse Kierkegaard's oeuvre – especially in terms of the form and the means of presentation of the religious - through the aesthetic devices of *ekphrasis* and the two types of *mimesis*: *eikastic* and *fantastic*. Through this strategy I show that the aesthetics and the religious in Kierkegaard are mutually interdependent, and not mutually exclusive, as is commonly assumed. Finally, I show that Kierkegaard is a conscious participant in the ongoing conversation concerning *mimesis* among his contemporaries, and that he makes a valuable contribution to this debate through his reflections on the genius, human autonomy, and art.

In Chapter Four I consider another aspect of *mimesis* as qualifying Kierkegaard's rendering of the self and its formation, namely, enactment or emulation. Here I show that Kierkegaard's autobiographical and non-autobiographical forms of self-presentation do not simply give accounts of the author's life, but contribute to the formation of his real life. This means that textual representation is at the same time an existential prescription; or put differently, Kierkegaard's efforts at self-imitation are instances of a modern understanding of *mimesis* where life emulates art, contrary to the classic rendering of the concept, where art represents life. Moreover, I show that the mimetic-existential relationship between author-text-reader is not just implicitly embedded in Kierkegaard's texts, but is explicitly argued by the author in his concepts of redoubling, reduplication and double reflection. Understood in this way, Kierkegaard's *mimesis of transformation* corresponds with Aristotle's notion of dynamic *mimesis* and Ricoeur's theory of mimetic "figuration."

Chapter Five revisits the question of imitation in Kierkegaard in the light of findings from the previous chapters. It does so primarily in two ways. First, it offers a reading of imitation in Kierkegaard in relation to his other mimetic engagements, such as representation, enactment and performance, and as necessarily involving them. Second, it formulates a new understanding of imitation that is more comprehensive than the usual scholarly accounts, and which thereby addresses problems outlined in Chapter One. Accordingly, my reading of imitation in Kierkegaard renders it as both indirect and “non-imitative.” The latter understanding I presented in Chapter Two, when discussing the Socratic dimension of the phenomenon in question. Here especially I argue that imitation in Kierkegaard is indirect, as it is concerned with the intention of an action (or an object), not with its detailed representation or enactment.

On a concluding note, I would like to notice that parts of this thesis have already been published during my time as a Ph.D. student. In my exposition of Girard’s mimetic theory, discussed in sections 2, 3E and 4C from Chapter Two, I include materials published as “Søren Kierkegaard’s and René Girard’s Reading of Job” (original title in Polish “Sørena Kierkegaarda i René Girarda odczytanie Hioba”) in *Tekstualia*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2014, pp. 81-8. Section 4 from Chapter Two has been published as “The Socratic Dimension of Kierkegaard’s Imitation” in *HeyJ*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2016 (pages unknown). Sections 1A and B from Chapter Three contain a substantial part of “Kierkegaard’s Aesthetics and the Aesthetic of Imitation” published in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, vol. 19, issue 1, 2014, pp.111-34 and in “Beyond the Imagery: The Encounters of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky with an Image of the Dead Christ” published in *The Dostoevsky Journal. An Independent Review*, vol. 14, 2014, pp. 110-29. Substantial parts of sections 2A from Chapter Two and 1B from Chapter Four have been published as “Self as Pluralistic Narrative in Kierkegaard,” in *The Relevance of Kierkegaard* (original title in Polish *W kręgu Kierkegaarda*), Duński Instytut Kultury & Derewiecki: Kety 2014, pp. 293-308. Section 2B from Chapter Four has been published as separate entries “Double-Reflection,” in *Kierkegaard’s Concepts*, t. II, *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 15, pp. 195-8, and “Redoubling/Reduplication” in *Kierkegaard’s Concepts*, t. V, *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 15, Burlington: Ashgate 2015, pp. 205-11.

I. CHAPTER ONE: FOLLOWING AFTER.

The main goal of the opening chapter of my thesis is to outline the key takes on Kierkegaard's *mimesis* in English-speaking academia. Apart from merely presenting these accounts, I will identify challenges scholars have been facing approaching the subject in question and certain limitations and shortcomings these readings entail. As well as introducing the reader to central issues concerning Kierkegaard's engagement with *mimesis*, this section will act as the main point of departure and reference for my own reading of the phenomenon in question in Kierkegaard's "second authorship."

In my exposition of the appraisals of imitation in Kierkegaard I focus on a group of scholars that I divide into three sets. The first group, to which I ascribe Marie Mikulova Thulstrup, Bradley Rau Dewey and M. Jamie Ferreira, offers what one may call a classic or pioneering investigation of the phenomenon in question. These scholars, apart from breaking the ground for systematic consideration of imitation in Kierkegaard, tacitly established "standards" for further discussions of imitation, and therefore they will serve us here as a point of departure for further investigation. These standards are conceptualization and a content-based approach to the subject and reading it "from the inside" as a coherent and continuous notion. Thulstrup reads imitation in correspondence with a unity of Kierkegaard's thought, literary production and existential development; so understood imitation is equated with suffering and martyrdom—hallmarks of genuine Christianity. Dewey's appraisal of the phenomenon in question, although it reads imitation in Kierkegaard as a religious practice, is more moderate and less masochistic. Ferreira sees imitation in Kierkegaard not as a merely religious expression but as an ethical regulation.

The second group of scholars, into which I include Sylvia Walsh, Joel D. S. Rasmussen, and Christopher Barnet, offers a more contextualized reading of Kierkegaard's notion imitation, which to a large extent consists in critical *reconsiderations* of the main *considerations* of the phenomenon in question entrenched in the works of Thulstrup, Dewey and Ferreira. The accounts of imitation presented in the second group do not limit themselves to Kierkegaard's oeuvre, but try to understand the phenomenon in question in relation to a larger body of works found in Kierkegaard's personal library. We have Walsh's references to Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Schleiermacher, Rasmussen's references to the German

Romantics and others of Kierkegaard's contemporaries, and Barnett's analysis in the context of *imitatio Christi*.

The last group of thinkers, including William Schweiker and Patrick Stokes, provides modern and postmodern approaches to the subject. Their accounts focus on Kierkegaard's oeuvre and the texts of Kierkegaard's contemporaries, but also read the phenomenon in question in the context of current philosophical debates. Both scholars, although different in their appraisals, analyze imitation in Kierkegaard predominantly in the context of contemporary discussions on selfhood and human agency.

My brief presentation of the accounts of imitation in Kierkegaard in academic literature will be followed by a concise evaluation that presents some consequences and limitations of the discussed accounts.²⁷ Among them we have some theological and philosophical problems. The perennial questions reappearing throughout most of the presentations will be those pertaining to the relation between Christ *qua* pattern for imitation and *qua* redeemer, the problem of will and grace in the imitation of Christ, and the obligatory dimension of imitation to Christians and non-Christians. I will also try to indicate certain relations between the thinkers in question, signposting various points of agreement and disagreement, and developments in ideas.

1. Classic academic appraisals

The first widely available systematic reading of Kierkegaard's engagement with imitation appears in Marie Mikulova Thulstrup's "Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Imitation."²⁸ The essay itself treats the subject of the imitation of Christ in a twofold

²⁷ Aside from the presented appraisals of imitation in Kierkegaard one can find several important takes on the problem considered in either a non-scholarly or non-systematic manner, or in non-English-speaking academia. A prominent example is Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Nachfolge* from 1937 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag) translated into English as "Discipleship" or "The Cost of Discipleship," "Nachfolge" literally means "following after," and in that sense clearly resembles Kierkegaard's "Efterfølgelse." The book compares "cheap grace" with "costly grace" and discusses Christian obedience and suffering, subjects that comprise some of the main themes of Kierkegaard's "second authorship." Moreover, the final section of the book bears the symptomatic title "The Image of Christ." As we will see, Bonhoeffer's "discipleship" takes a great toll on the dominant readings of the problem. Less detailed presentations of Kierkegaard's imitation are, among others, in Walter Lowrie *A Short Life of Kierkegaard* from 1942 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press) and Louis Dupré *Kierkegaard as Theologian: The Dialectic of Christian Existence* from 1963 (London: Sheed and Ward).

²⁸ Marie Mikulova Thulstrup, "Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Imitation," *A Kierkegaard Critique*, ed. Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup, New York: Harper 1962, pp. 266-85. The article is a translation from the Danish "Efterfølgelsens dialektik hos Søren Kierkegaard," *Dansk teologisk Tidsskrift*, transl. by H. R. Harcourt, vol. 21, 1958, pp. 193-209.

manner. On the one hand, it seems that Kierkegaard is not interested in the phenomenon of imitation *per se*, or is somehow dismissive of imitation. Hence, it is predominantly the necessity of addressing the message embedded in the Gospels that urges Kierkegaard to engage with imitation. On the other hand, the imitation of Christ is a conceptual response to his considerations of mysticism and asceticism, both linked with the social and religious phenomenon of *imitatio Christi*. Such a complex approach produces a hermeneutical horizon of problems, among which are a) the question whether the imitation of Christ is demanded from all Christians, b) the problem of the relationship between Christ as the Pattern and Christ as the Redeemer, and c) the relationship between grace and one's efforts in being or becoming a genuine Christian represented in self-denial and spiritual training.

The main subjects associated with the imitation of Christ are suffering, dying to the world, martyrdom and grace. According to Thulstrup, Kierkegaardian imitation of Christ is not tantamount in its essence with the religious training practiced by pietistic Christians following the medieval movement of *imitatio Christi*; the former is defined by its relation with the idea of being contemporaneous with Christ, as the latter is concerned with the mere outward expressions of imitation (copying), according to the scholar. The imitation of Christ disregards physical expressions of piety characteristic to asceticism, such as scourging. In fact genuine imitation expresses itself in an inward dimension of self-denial and self-discipline: "Imitation as the first step, i.e., in the direction of self-discipline and asceticism, must occur through the person's free decision, in order to 'develop a sense of the need for grace.'"²⁹ Kierkegaard sees the undertaking of the imitation of Christ dialectically in a process or a threefold path. First (1) the believer is determined to imitate Christ, then 2) in that "desire" to imitate Christ one receives Him truly as a gift, not as a result of one's will, and lastly 3) as a result of the former two preconditions imitation occurs as a fruit of faith that "meets" the believer. It is so because the believer encounters the imitation as given and as a gift that is from beyond the self's will.

Moreover, according to Thulstrup, Kierkegaard posits two types of imitation of Christ: severe or radical (for a Christian having "direct God-relationship" that is a gift of grace) and the ordinary type of imitation. A genuine Christian is the one whose willingness reinforced by the gift of grace facilitates or engenders "the real imitation

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 271. This is seemingly a quotation of an unspecified origin from Kierkegaard.

(renunciation and dying unto the world).”³⁰ At first, by distinguishing the two versions of Christianity, Thulstrup automatically differentiates two types of believers: those who received the gift from God allowing them to become martyrs through persecution and ridicule, and those not having this obligation, among whom Kierkegaard locates himself. However, the requirement of imitation is eventually shifted upon all Christians.

A similar case occurs in Kierkegaard’s understanding of Christ as the Pattern for imitation. Thulstrup presents two dilemmas related to that theme: the relation between Christ understood as the Pattern and Redeemer, and the universality of the Pattern. The first conundrum is that the Pattern conflicts with being the Redeemer, and *vice versa*. Thulstrup does not elaborate on that subject, but giving the *aporia* a predominantly theological emphasis she notices that in his death, Christ expiated sin; therefore “it is easier for men to become Christians.”³¹ If one assumes that the problem that Thulstrup bears in mind (although she does not explain where the actual problem is located) is that Christ *qua* Redeemer cannot be imitated—it would be blasphemy—the resolution that she argues Kierkegaard gives to the problem seems to be even more puzzling. For Thulstrup, Kierkegaard simply “solves” the problem by concentrating on Christ *qua* the Pattern. In that sense the author follows Kierkegaard’s dialectic methodology of being “a merely corrective,”³² which consists in his presenting particular ideas only fragmentarily in order to stimulate the audience to provoke a reaction and articulate a response. This is hardly any explanation. Moreover, following the above sketched understanding, it is not Kierkegaard who solves the problem, but the problem has to be somehow answered by the reader herself, at least partially.

The universality of Christ as the Pattern to all believers is another of the challenges confronting Kierkegaard, according to Thulstrup. Initially she claims that, on the one hand Christ cannot work as the Pattern for everyone, because that would imply merely undertaking “external” imitation of Christ.³³ That was the mistake of the Middle Ages. Christ is not the Pattern because he is qualitatively different from men. Moreover, not everyone has to imitate Christ, as it is only the requirement for the severe form of Christianity. But on the other hand, Christ is the Pattern, although

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 269-7.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

unattainable, because by his ideality Christ makes people see their imperfections, which compels them to ask for grace. Later on Kierkegaard claims that Christ is the Pattern for imitation and, while there is no distinction between ordinary and extraordinary Christians, the demand for imitation is universal.

“Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Imitation” locates itself as a pioneering (in English-speaking academia) endeavor that aims to bring into focus the importance of the imitation of Christ in Kierkegaard’s oeuvre. Her account of the imitation of Christ provides a very severe and dark vision of the life of a genuine Christian—a form of punishment and an examination filled with suffering—and a masochistic appraisal of Christianity as a continual dying, “most terrible of all agonies,” that has its goal the termination of the human existence.³⁴

However remarkable and distinct Thulstrup’s account may be, one has to notice that it has significant limitations: it is built upon premises, that (as we will see further down in this investigation) will be reinforced, altered, or challenged by other thinkers. First, Thulstrup clearly implies “definite coherence of Kierkegaard’s thought as a whole”³⁵ and denies any possible alteration and discontinuity in Kierkegaard’s thinking, pointing to “dialectical purification”³⁶ and the process of “gradua[l] clarif[ication]”³⁷ occurring in his thought. Second, Thulstrup refers to Kierkegaard’s journals as the main source of information, maintaining that they provide the appropriate point of view on Kierkegaard’s production. Consequently, Thulstrup stresses that one has to understand and define Kierkegaard according to the way Kierkegaard expected it to happen. Despite the critical mode characteristic of the collection of essays in which her work is published—*A Kierkegaard Critique*—Thulstrup is insufficiently critical.³⁸ Third, Thulstrup limits herself to Kierkegaard’s texts in understanding his engagements with imitation. Faint reference to Johannes Tauler, indication of similarities with Thomistic teaching, a few unexplored remarks on the *imitatio Christi*, and a mention of a potential positive relation between Kierkegaard and some Christian mystics seem to exhaust the historical situation of the problem for Thulstrup.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

³⁸ Thulstrup’s perimeters are radical and authoritative. See the very last conclusion to her article: *Ibid.*, p. 281. “Kierkegaard’s pattern of thought is undeniably logical...contains no unconscious shifting ideas, no distortion, no perversion. If one does not want to accept Kierkegaard’s results, one must necessarily alter the premises.”

Bradley Rau Dewey's *The New Obedience. Kierkegaard on Imitating Christ*—initially his PhD dissertation, *The Imitation of Christ in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard*—appeared about the same time as Thulstrup's article in English.³⁹ Unlike Thulstrup's essay, Dewey takes imitation as the primary object of examination. While for Thulstrup imitation is a facet of the genuine Christian life, Dewey indicates that true Christian life is “the life of Imitation.”

The work offers an extensive analysis of the phenomenon of imitation in Kierkegaard that is built on recognition of a triangular structure of imitation that comprises the imitator, the model of imitation, and the technique of imitation. Dewey identifies and examines these elements in the three divisions that comprise his work; namely, “The Candidate Imitator,” “The One Imitated,” “The Practice of Imitation.”

Kierkegaard's concept of imitation is read by Dewey as an advancement upon “past interpretations of imitation [that] often faile[d] to provide it with the proper psychological base, living source, and adaptable content.”⁴⁰ In his reading of the problem, Kierkegaard skillfully deals with or avoids the problems with imitation that make other readings defective, partial or irrelevant to the contemporary world. According to Dewey, Kierkegaard “achieves...a combination of adaptability and integrity [pertinent to] a life which is forever changing, complex, ambiguous, idiosyncratic. The Kierkegaardian understanding of imitation is subtle as the subtlest ethical puzzle, as complex as the most involved ethical situation.”⁴¹

The first division of the dissertation gives an account of the structure of a human self that is involved in “the life of imitation.” So understood, the self must “evolve” from a mere self-awareness to the maturity of the single individual that is endowed with independent will capable of making ethical-religious choices. The imitator must possess subjective passionate *I* and be trained in self-discipline and obedience.⁴² The development of selfhood reaches its decisive moment in what

³⁹ Bradley R. Dewey, *The New Obedience. Kierkegaard on Imitating Christ*, Washington and Cleveland: Corpus Book 1968 and Bradley R. Dewey, *The Imitation of Christ in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard*, PhD. Dissertation, Ann Arbor: U.M.I., 1991.

⁴⁰ Dewey, *The New Obedience*, pp. xxvi- xxvii.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 19. “And any success in this endeavor does not come about by neutrally admiring the ideal of Christianity or by yearning after the heroes of the faith. Only by the labor of steeling the will and harnessing the passions can one direct his life in the footsteps of Jesus. And in the view of the intense and persecuted life of Jesus—the one whom Christians...are to imitate—it is clear that the title ‘Christian’ is granted only to those who face unflinchingly the terror of the demands, apply

Dewey calls radical choice; it allows the would-be Christian to meet and appropriate “the ideal Christian life pattern.”⁴³ In this passionate choice to believe, one chooses to be a Christian, to imitate Christ, and then one must endure the passionate life of imitation with all its risks and uncertainty.⁴⁴

The second division articulates Christ as a concrete historical existence. This emphasis is necessary considering scholarly attempts to dehistoricize Christ and a tendency to perceive human beings *en masse*. This section also tackles another dimension of Christ’s being the imitative pattern, which is his dialectical quality of producing offense and attraction. So understood, Christ is first and foremost the offense to—as Dewey distinguishes—“scientific reason,” “logical reason,” and “comfortable reason.” On the other hand, Christ offers inner peace and reconciliation, addresses the deepest longing and needs of human beings, and offers forgiveness of sins.

In this brief exposition I will concentrate on the third and the final division of the work, “The Practice of Imitation,” because it is predominantly in this part that we are exposed to a synthesizing exposition of Kierkegaard’s imitation. This part offers a “condensed” account of the theological, psychological, phenomenological nature of the imitation of Christ and supports us with a structural outlook on imitation. In the third division, Dewey distinguishes three types of imitation, namely, facsimile imitation, ascetic imitation, and the following of Christ.

He identifies facsimile imitation as having a twofold nature; it manifests itself in human attempts to have certain identity with Christ and as mere copying, or as Dewey calls it, “slavish adherence to one set pattern.”⁴⁵ The author claims that Kierkegaard disregards facsimile type of imitation as the true type of imitation for two reasons. First, the idea of a possible form of unity with Christ is prevented by the qualitative difference between Christ and men. Subsequently, Christ’s exceptionality can be seen in his social and ethical qualities,⁴⁶ but chiefly in his theological traits.⁴⁷

them honestly and thoroughly to their own specific lives, and exert the necessary discipline to achieve obedience.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 108. “Since each person has a singular ‘eternal vocation expressly for him,’ there is little chance that all will become carpenters-prophet-martyrs.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106. “...Kierkegaard does not advocate a reduplication of Jesus’ life. He certainly advocates a version of *imitatio Christi*; but it is not facsimile *imitation*. A central Kierkegaardian motif is that Jesus Christ is God. Such a bald assertion prohibits ordinary man from reduplication Jesus’ life.”

Second, the Christian is commanded to perform good works, (therefore imitating Christ by doing the same as he did, e.g. being compassionate), but not necessarily under the same circumstances and for the same reasons. Moreover, Dewey emphasizes the demand for imitation is introduced in “flexible terminology,”⁴⁸ in contrast to the “rigid framework of facsimile imitation,”⁴⁹ because it welcomes “innovation”⁵⁰ on the side of the imitator. Dewey notices that the whole business of discussing of facsimile imitation is motivated by “Kierkegaard’s valiant effort to maintain a dynamic tension between the allegiance to Jesus as pattern and his mission to preserve the single individual.”⁵¹

The ascetic imitation recognizes the absolute difference between Christ and men. However, it endorses a life of radical self-abnegation as a way to foster and achieve likeness with Christ. Dewey points out that, although Kierkegaard had in his private library works of writers like Thomas à Kempis, Johannes Tauler, and William Law—whom Dewey perceives as the representatives of asceticism of *imitatio Christi*—the Dane himself was not an adherent of asceticism.⁵² Dewey emphasizes that in following in Christ’s footsteps becoming “propertyless is not the end of obedience but only the beginning. More is required than conformity to the observable Jesus.”⁵³ Moreover, because the monastic life aims at leaving a substantial part of the world outside its gates, ascetic imitation does not agree with seeing “all God’s creation...good”⁵⁴ and with the fact that it is a Christian task to seek the Kingdom of God where one already is.⁵⁵

After disregarding facsimile and ascetic imitation, Dewey embarks on a positive presentation of the concept in “The Following of Christ.” He introduces a new dimension to the subject by offering an account of the etymology of “imitation” in Danish set against its New Testament understandings. Consequently, Dewey finds using “following” instead of “imitation” crucial for proper rendering of the concept. Trying to delineate imitation as following, he concludes that the task is impossible,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Dewey, *The Imitation of Christ in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard*, p. 210.

⁵¹ Dewey, *The New Obedience*, p. 109.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 112-3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

for the reason that following in its structure resembles the self, which itself cannot be defined.⁵⁶

In a similar manner, calling following Christ “a life-style,” Dewey explains that it cannot be pinned down and may entail different life-attitudes and decisions. Still, following does not endorse the rule that anything goes; three steps initiating imitation and the right motivation for imitation can be identified. “The title of follower could legitimately be claimed by a wide variety of Christians as long as they had preceded their acts with (1) intense study of the pattern, (2) careful analyses of the problems of their time and locale, and (3) searingly honest self-appraisal.”⁵⁷ Examining motives for following, Dewey disregards seeking personal experience, escaping hell, and pursuing mystical union with Jesus, and affirms becoming a follower out of gratitude as the legitimate intention.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the would-be Christian has to continuously examine her life against the ideal life-style she finds fathoming the narratives of the New Testament.⁵⁹ Imitation of Christ is therefore a process of “discerning the pattern and appropriating it into his own life-style;”⁶⁰ but it is also “a personal encounter with a living presence”⁶¹ of Jesus, which Dewey identifies with Kierkegaard’s “contemporaneity,” and understands in Kierkegaard as a form of “a mystical fellowship or communion with the once dead and now risen Jesus of Nazareth.”⁶²

Lastly Dewey discusses the problem of suffering and the ontological-theological subjects of becoming, repentance and grace pertinent to imitation. The suffering of the follower results from the fact that her life does not conform to the requirements of the world she lives in. Because her life is radical and intense—not safe and calculable—and she displays ultimate obedience to Christ, contrary to

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122. “We went in search of a definition and discovered that no one set of criteria can be used to define following. Despite the fact that following constitutes a—if not *the*—central reference point for Kierkegaard’s authorship, no specifiable definition seems possible. Whenever such a definition is attempted, the concept of following becomes maddeningly elusive, volatile, kaleidoscopic. But this should not come as a surprise. Since the self’s life cannot be easily or normatively specified, neither can the Christian life-style of following.”

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123. Numbering mine.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 136. “As he encounters difficulty and failure, he will repair to the text for further reflection. As engages in new behavior patterns, he will constantly check them against the New Testament context. So he proceeds to work out his life-style in a constant alternation or reflecting and acting, acting and evaluating, failing and starting over, innovating and revising.”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 138

⁶² *Ibid.* It is important to notice, however that Dewey previously denies unity with Christ as belonging to the imitation of Christ.

seeking one's own good and addressing one's own needs, she collides with the world to which she is already dead. Dying to the world causes more suffering than physical death, because it lasts the whole life, and it is exercised in disregarding worldly values of comfort, success, power, etc. As Dewey emphasizes, suffering is an indispensable part of imitation, indeed, "an exercise in suffering self-sacrifice,"⁶³ though, "one is not commanded *per se* to suffer."⁶⁴ Yet, this is problematic. Although his rationale is as follows: "given our world and human nature, Christian behavior will always be rewarded with...suffering,"⁶⁵ it seems difficult to reconcile statements "In order to conform to the pattern, one must necessarily suffer"⁶⁶ with "Suffering, as suffering alone, is not required of the Christian."⁶⁷

Dewey distinguishes internal and inflicted suffering. The former is caused by doubt and uncertainty that inescapably accompanies the life of the Christian; these pertain to the improvable nature of the Christian faith, uncertainty whether the follower has genuinely identified the pattern, and whether her motivations and actions are right. Inflicted suffering comes from the outside. The follower of Christ is deemed extravagant and challenging by her way of life, and through her self-limitation she does not fit worldly Christendom and must be either "driven away or silenced [by]...Condescension. Derision. Exclusion. Death."⁶⁸

Facing persecution from one's community and battling one's own weakness are steps on the way of ceaselessly becoming a true Christian; therefore one is never an imitator but the *candidate* imitator and would-be Christian.⁶⁹ The acknowledgement of that fact leads one to repentance and grace, which itself is crucial for fostering following after Christ.⁷⁰ If that is the case with the primary role of grace in following, one finds problematic Dewey's earlier insistence that *repentance* is the stimulus for a mature selfhood that is "necessary to the

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 160-1. "[P]roper following of Christ results, not from fear of retribution, but from thanksgiving for divine grace. The Christian can claim no merit for his following, but confess a total reliance on grace...Thus, grace constitutes the initial motivation for following, the continuing encouragement along the way, the exorciser of pride in accomplishment, and the saving consolation to the repentant wanderer."

appropriation of the Christian life pattern”⁷¹ or that it is “the ‘new birth’ by which a man leaves his previous state of wandering error and moves to truth.”⁷²

In conclusion, Dewey’s exposition of the imitation of Christ is undertaken with great diligence and is thoroughly structured. His claims are not as radical as those of Thulstrup, and Dewey seems to address possible counter understandings while presenting his own interpretation. His outlook considers historical context, although giving it a negative approach in the end, and takes into account the etymology of imitation, a move that will greatly influence subsequent reception of that phenomenon. However, Dewey’s reading of the imitation of Christ in Kierkegaard is dictated by “how” he reads the Danish thinker. Dewey endorses Thulstrup’s reading of Kierkegaard as a coherent writer, and consequently, the imitation of Christ as a coherent concept. According to Dewey, one can indicate some fluctuations in terms of what is underscored of the imitation of Christ at different times of Kierkegaard’s production, but in fact his idea of following is systematically planned and consistent.⁷³ Accordingly, Dewey’s approach is structured by the methodology of conceptualization.

Another distinctive approach to Kierkegaard’s imitation is offered in M. Jamie Ferreira’s *Love’s Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love*⁷⁴ and *Kierkegaard*.⁷⁵ Although her reading of imitation is multidimensional, it predominantly stresses the ethical-practical dimension of imitation. In the subchapter “Concrete Imitation of Christ,” Ferreira asks two fundamental questions: what is imitation *per se* and what is being imitated in the very act of imitation. The answer to these questions is a concrete act. It means that imitation is a palpable undertaking and what is imitated is again a very tangible thing, a deed. Ferreira explicitly addresses the seemingly unanswered conundrum formulated by Thulstrup: the relation between Christ understood as the Pattern and Redeemer. She says, “Since we cannot be called to do what Christ did in the sense of imitating His soteriological achievements, what we are called on to do is to follow the example he set in his human nature.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 203. “[T]he unusual nature of the practice of Imitation possesses a coherence and cogency which can be seen—even if the vision is more reflected than direct.”

⁷⁴ M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010.

⁷⁵ M. Jamie Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2008.

Kierkegaard sees Christ as the prototype in meeting earthly needs.”⁷⁶ To imitate Christ is to “‘put on Christ,’” to “‘*re-present*’ Christ.”⁷⁷ Hence by “consoling others...seeking the company of the cripples, the despised, the sinners, the publicans...we are doing what [Christ] did.”⁷⁸ While stressing the performative dimension of the imitation of Christ, Ferreira simultaneously acknowledges the performative dimension of imitation as a concept. By performing an ethical act we make Christ present in the concrete here and now, and therefore what is being brought about is a particular understanding of ethics as loving the other, where the theological dimension is read through the lenses of ethics.

Explaining the relation between grace and imitation, Ferreira puts forward the idea that both human capacities and grace are at work in imitating. It is so because “Christ is ‘the prototype oriented to the universally human, of which everyone is capable’”⁷⁹ and consequently the imitation of Christ is required from all adherents of Christianity, but it is in fact possible only “‘after grace and by grace.’”⁸⁰ Although Ferreira appears to be more interested in human capacities than in grace in her exposition of imitation, and, moreover, still finds the relation between the two problematic,⁸¹ she concludes, “we can infer that the only imitation of Christ that is required from us is possible for us as grace-filled humans.”⁸²

Taking stock of that reasoning, one can identify certain problems with marrying the imitation of Christ understood as ethical actions and grace. Are all ethical undertakings possible only if we are grace-filled people? And if attending “the cripple, the sinners, the publicans, etc.”⁸³ stems not from “a Christian motivation,” is Christ made present in such actions, or not?

Another of Ferreira’s considerations of imitation of Christ is suffering. Initially she seems to follow Thulstrup’s rejection of Kierkegaard’s imitation as

⁷⁶ Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, p. 82.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* Ferreira quotes here from Kierkegaard’s *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 372, entry 1939 (SKS 27, 629; Papir 507).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* Ferreira quotes here from Kierkegaard’s *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 337, entry 1884 (SKS 24, 106, NB22:5).

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 123. “When Kierkegaard writes that ‘as the prototype Christ gives absolute expression to that which naturally no human being achieves: absolutely holding to God in all things’ it is not clear whether we should focus on the term ‘naturally’—and thus read the claim as allowing that supernaturally, *with grace*, we can imitate Christ’s perfect holding to God in all things or whether Kierkegaard means that we can never (even with grace) succeed in being as perfect as was Christ is his human nature’s holding onto God.”

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 82.

positively influenced by various religious traditions of asceticism and flagellation. However, as she goes along she seems to get closer to the position presented by Dewey that suffering and misery are not the indispensable consequences of imitation. In the symptomatic section “Self-Denial for Its Own Sake,” she says that suffering is not the goal in itself; it is nonetheless, a very likely outcome of the imitation of Christ.⁸⁴ Seeking suffering is morally wrong, and results from a misunderstanding of Christian self-denial; we should even “seek every possible means to avoid suffering.”⁸⁵ “Dying to the world” and “forsaking the world,” is to be understood differently from Thulstrup, and the reasons for this seem to be located in how both thinkers grasp the requirement of imitation. For Thulstrup, the requirement of imitation pertains only to Christians. Moreover there are two types of imitation, ordinary and severe, where the latter is required only from those who have been given the gift of grace. To the contrary, Ferreira facilitates the universal demand for the imitation of Christ understood as loving one’s neighbor by binding imitation with love, and the demand of imitation with the demand of love from which “no one can be excluded.”⁸⁶

The problematic of this collision—human capacities and the universal requirement of the imitation of Christ (and love)—is not being glossed over by Ferreira, quite the reverse. She notices, “the command’s strangeness need not be due to its impossible physical demands on us”⁸⁷—love itself and its requirement constitutes “offense.”⁸⁸ The subject of “offense” as related to the imitation of Christ is discussed in her other work, *Kierkegaard*, especially in “*Practice in Christianity, Discourses*, and the ‘Attack.’”⁸⁹ At the outset of the chapter, she indicates that although “*Practice in Christianity* is a book about the imitation of Christ, who is the pattern or prototype of the Christian life...[and] it deeply explores the notion of ‘offense,’ [in fact the book itself] is dedicated to revealing the connection between

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 237. See also: her *Kierkegaard*, p. 181. “However, Anti-Climacus makes significant qualifications about suffering. He suggests that the likelihood or even the inevitability of suffering does not equal the recommendation to adopt suffering for its own sake. Suffering is not a goal in itself – “enough lowliness and abasement surely come of themselves” if we try to imitate Christ (185), enough suffering is “in store” for us without trying to make more (190). Suffering simply follows from holding fast to the prototype (193, 197).”

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 237. Interestingly enough, this quotation in its original appears not in the context of imitating Christ but in the context of one’s striving as “atoning and beneficial for others.”

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36. See her rationale in subchapter “Bindingness and Scope of Commandment,” pp. 36-7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, pp. 167-87.

them in an ever-widening circle of inquiry.”⁹⁰ Moreover, to what she has previously noted that the imitation of Christ has a practical dimension, Ferreira adds that the key to understand imitation is the fact that it is a practice, or that the “practice” of Christianity involves “imitation.”⁹¹

Ferreira identifies what she calls the offensive dimension of imitation and the two types of imitation: “imitation of Christ’s obedient abasement and imitation of Christ’s compassion for others.”⁹² The offensiveness of imitation lies in the fact that we have to imitate Christ who in his earthly life was abased and suffered.⁹³ Its first practical dimension, which Ferreira calls the “situation of contemporaneity,” requires the follower “to be present to [Christ] in such a way that one risks insult, persecution from others.”⁹⁴ This means that when we imitate Christ we imitate his attitudes or mores, which, from external/social perspectives, are unacceptable or ostracized.⁹⁵ As an example, Ferreira first contrasts the human tendency to be compassionate towards one’s peers with our consideration towards those who are different to us or unrelated. Then she juxtaposes detached compassion “from a distance” with engaged compassion “in actuality.”⁹⁶ These two imitative practices and the exercising in contemporaneity with the abased Christ are not mere ends but the means to something greater, the task of humbling oneself before God under “what it means in the strictest sense to be a Christian.”⁹⁷ Although the universal requirement of imitation collides with human capacities, and therefore the individual’s power to hold to Christ may fail (a failure that in effect produces the feeling of sorrow and misery in the life of an individual), it is in fact “Christ who holds onto him.”⁹⁸ Ferreira notices, “It is not all about suffering, it seems, but also about rejoicing in life.”⁹⁹

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 173. See also: p. 179. “In the end, the ‘situation of contemporaneity’ posits a direct connection between offence and imitation: ‘to be an imitator means that your life has as much similarity to his as is possible for a human life to have’ (PC, 106).”

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 174. “Offense and imitation are connected because only in the offensive situation of contemporaneity are we aware of what to imitate. We are to imitate Christ’s obedience to God and the abasement that (is) involved.”

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 175. Ferreira quotes here from Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1991, p. 67 (SKS 12, 79).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Ferreira, *Kierkegaard*, p. 176. See also: p. 181. “That in this world ‘love is hated’ and ‘truth is persecuted’ (198) is a deep and constant refrain, and the stringency of the requirement to suffer reaches such a pitch that people will likely think (mistakenly) that Christianity is ‘cruel’ (196). In

In the third part of the book, Ferreira discusses several points of reference for imitation. First, she returns to the love-imitation connection: "...the world 'crucifies love.' *Practice in Christianity* is practice in loving, as Christ loved."¹⁰⁰ The discourse focuses on the theme of Christ's loftiness and abasement as his paradoxical features. Christ's loftiness (physical elevation) and abasement met on the cross, from where He calls *all* to come to him. Second, Ferreira re-engages the subject of abasement by showing that Christ is the pattern to be imitated by virtue of "passing the 'test' of life each of us is subject to [and therefore] 'developed the prototype for us.'"¹⁰¹ According to such a reading, Christ, initially given as an "image," becomes the "prototype."¹⁰² Moreover, it is imagination that is at work here allowing us to see "an image of abasement as a demand on us," that is possible by what the author calls "seeing-as."¹⁰³ Third, the association of Christ with images is being reinforced by the notion of the image of Christ as "the truth," where truth is to be lived out, not merely known. Imitating Christ as the truth, in the context of the criticism of the Danish Church, means living truth out, not just knowing it, and hatred of the world that is opposed to loving God.¹⁰⁴ Lastly, what Ferreira calls "imitation" proper, opposes an imitator of Christ to an admirer of Christ, where the latter merely admires but does not strive to be what he admires.¹⁰⁵

This reading posits a series of theological and philosophical problems. To name just a few, one has to ask about the method or strategy by which imagination is engaged in the course of imitation, and to what extent. Some reservations pertain to the nature of Christ (ontological and anthropological) in the light of the process of Christ's becoming the pattern to be imitated and the nature and content of the supposed "test" Christ successfully passed. Questions concerning the status of Christ as an image (an image of what?¹⁰⁶), and the difference between Christ *qua* image and *qua* pattern are not fully explored. We will see them advanced in the further readings of Kierkegaard's imitation presented below.

this way, it intensifies the paradox that Christianity, which seems to be 'cruel,' is actually 'leniency and love' (196)."

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹⁰⁶ It is unclear what sort of image is maintained here. If it is "an image of abasement as a demand on us," the difference between the image and the pattern is open to question. On a different note, unspecified is the difference between Christ as an image of and as a pattern for abasement.

2. Contextualized appraisals: Kierkegaard's Library

Although it seems that Sylvia Walsh in her *Living Poetically* does not specifically concentrate on the imitation of Christ, the subject is not out of her focus.¹⁰⁷ Her main consideration of imitation is in relation to Christ as the prototype, where the prototype is understood in the light of Kierkegaard's ideals.¹⁰⁸ As Walsh maintains, Kierkegaard as a Christian poet believes "the highest existential ideality is to be a Christian."¹⁰⁹ These ideals must be presented in a dialectic mode that comprises "prescribed determinations of human existence, not possibilities created by the imagination of the poet...and...their highest expression in existence."¹¹⁰

For the author, Christ represents the Christian ideal because he "has fully expressed the ideal in his life;"¹¹¹ Christ so understood is compared with humans who "are no more than caricatures in relation to [their] ideals."¹¹² Kierkegaard's ability to truly present the ideals, not merely to produce or construct them, rests in his skills in dialectic and imagination, of which he is so convinced.¹¹³

Although in her understanding of the imitation of Christ Walsh refers to the works of Thulstrup and Dewey,¹¹⁴ here understanding of imitation and the model for imitation is somewhat different: Walsh sees the ideality of Christ in a Platonic sense.¹¹⁵ Central to her understanding of imitation is what she calls the "dialectic of inversion," which resembles Socrates' technique of negative argumentation but also expresses the existential dimension of his thought.¹¹⁶ In the "dialectic of inversion"

¹⁰⁷ Sylvia Walsh, *Living Poetically. Kierkegaard's Existential Aesthetics*, University Park: Penn State Press 2010. "Christ as the Prototype," is in fact the title of the penultimate short section of her book, not counting "Epilogue." *Ibid.*, pp. 236-9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 228. After noting a journal entry that unreservedly display Kierkegaard's self-confidence in that matter, Walsh writes: "Aided by an imagination that in his case is not immediate but rather follows after reflection or the dialectical, Kierkegaard thinks that he can 'grasp all the Christian qualifications in the most faithful and vital way.'" ¹¹³ Walsh quotes here from Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*, vol. 5, p. 410, entry 6061 (SKS 20, 227; NB2:225).

¹¹⁴ See her reference 17, p. 237.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 237. "Christ serves as the criterion and goal for human existence by being a model for imitation. In this he may be viewed as the equivalent, in a Christian perspective, to the Universal Forms that serve as a standard for poetic imitation in a Platonic view of art and reality." See also hints to the Platonic theory of imitation on p. 111.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

Walsh links imitation with reduplication showing that it constitutes “the process of reduplication or actualization of the Christian ideality in existence.”¹¹⁷ Moreover, the proximity between Platonic and Kierkegaardian imitation is located in the fact that both types stress human incapability to fully realize its requirements (human capacity and the ideality of the imitative model). From that, Kierkegaard arrives at the “need for reliance on Christ as redeemer...and grace.”¹¹⁸

Walsh’s appraisal of the role of grace in imitation is different from the one presented by Thulstrup. Grace is not needed for the severe imitator to undertake the second type of imitation, as maintained by Thulstrup. On the contrary, on the one hand, the goal of imitation is turning one towards grace, and on the other hand, grace is an essential “part” of imitation. The imitator’s ardent striving to reduplicate in herself the Christian ideal results in unearthing the truth about her ever mounting distance from that ideal. So understood, the role of grace also does not agree with the appraisal offered by Ferreira, for whom the center of gravity rests on the offensiveness of imitation that supposedly explains the problem of the requirement of imitation and limitations of human capacity. What both thinkers, Walsh and Ferreira, agree upon is the fact that imitation has as its aim bringing the imitator into the state of humility.

The difference between Christ *qua* Redeemer and *qua* the pattern is briefly explained by stressing that Christ is not a direct prototype but the prototype for human existence in a more general sense. Such an interpretation reinforces the Platonic understanding of the ideals by Walsh, but it also testifies to something else, her specific reading of Kierkegaard’s critique of the Middle Ages. Accordingly, Walsh perceives the misconception about the imitation of Christ in the Middle Ages not in the fact that—as Thulstrup would have it—it argued for mere external imitation and its universal requirement. Rather, the issue at stake was the belief in the attainability of the Christian ideal in a concrete life.¹¹⁹ Moreover, Walsh’s appraisal of imitation’s

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 237. “A similarity between the Christian and the Platonic [view of imitation] may be also seen in that both perspectives regard imitation as imperfect in relation to the ideal model or standard. In Kierkegaard’s view, the relation to the Christian ideality through imitation of Christ as paradigm is complex, dialectical one characterized by inversion and a need for reliance on Christ as redeemer. In contrast to the medieval conception of the imitation of Christ, which in Kierkegaard’s view held up Christ literally and directly as a prototype for humanity as assumed that we could actually achieve the ideal of resembling him, Kierkegaard maintains that the primary function of the prototype is to teach us how greatly we are in need of grace.”

¹¹⁹ See also a reformulation of that thesis in Walsh’s *Thinking Christianly in an Existential Mode*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009, p. 141-3.

“inverse dialectic” reconsiders the fact that our likeness to Christ means in fact our unlikeness; we become like Christ in our difference to Him. This idea will be developed further down this text in section “Difference-Inversion” from Chapter Five.

The problem of Christian suffering is a subject of extensive investigation in Walsh’s “Standing at the Crossroads: The Invitation of Christ to a Life of Suffering.”¹²⁰ After distinguishing several forms of suffering, the author identifies two main types of suffering: Christian and non-Christian (aesthetic, ethical, and immanent religious). In relation to the imitation of Christ she identifies two distinctions of Christian suffering that are somehow interrelated. The first distinction is that of innocent and guilty. Human innocent suffering has an outward character, as it is occasioned by external persecution, and as such may not be different in its quality from the suffering of non-Christians, like Socrates.¹²¹ Christ’s innocent suffering was not before people, but before God. Christians’ innocent suffering before people, qualifies as guilty suffering before God. Therefore “in relation to both kinds [guilty and innocent] Christ does not serve so much as a *pattern for imitation* as a standard by which ‘an eternal chasmic abyss’ and ‘eternal difference’ is fixed between his suffering and that of other human beings.”¹²²

The second discernment of Christian suffering identifies the one that is related to Christ’s inward suffering—and is to a certain extent parallel to the suffering He went through¹²³—and the one that only the followers of Christ suffer from, which has no parallel with the suffering of Christ.¹²⁴ In the former type of suffering, the followers of Christ (may) suffer only the one level of suffering that comes from the fact of Christ’s incarnation, especially his psychosomatic dimension. “This hidden, inward suffering on Christ’s part is painful for two reasons, first because it is an inwardness that has to be concealed, and second because he must appear to be other

¹²⁰ Sylvia Walsh, “Standing at the Crossroads: The Invitation of Christ to a Life of Suffering” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 20, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Macon: Mercer University Press 2004, pp. 125-60.

¹²¹ For comparison see also the qualification of the voluntary in Kierkegaard’s understanding of suffering. *Ibid.*, p. 142. “Reconciling oneself to unavoidable loss is also seen in paganism...But to give up everything voluntarily—that is Christianity.” In the light of that quotation, the fact that Socrates did not reconcile himself to the unavoidable, but died voluntarily seems problematic.

¹²² Walsh, “Standing at the Crossroads,” p. 134. Italics mine.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 152. Walsh notes here a passage from Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, p. 136ff (SKS 12, 140): “the suffering of inwardness, suffering of soul, or what might be called the secret of the sufferings that were inseparable from [Christ’s] life in unrecognizability from the time he appeared until the very last.”

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-3.

than he really is.”¹²⁵ As a consequence, the followers of Christ might be taken, as Christ was, conversely to their actions and motivations, as belligerent, cruel, unloving and unchristian. On the more advanced level, unparalleled to the human, Christ suffered “the second time”¹²⁶ and constituted the theological dimension of offense. The second type of human suffering is related to “inverse dialectic” and it entails that by being far away from the truth that is Christ and standing before God, humans suffer from anxiety, self-doubt and self-accusation. Therefore, in relation to imitation, Christ serves as the prototype of Christian suffering only in the first sense.¹²⁷

Although the article itself starts with a qualification of a particular development in Kierkegaard’s understanding of the role of suffering in the Christian life (“Kierkegaard progressively worked out his understanding of Christian suffering”), a thorough reading shows that the attempt at a systematic account does not evade some serious problems, of which I should name just two. One pertains to the confusion of the “mimetic” terminology that is not sharp in distinction, against well-drawn distinctions and qualifications in types of suffering. Walsh almost uncritically uses terms and phrases like Christ as the Prototype, as the paradigm for Christian sufferers, pattern for imitation, but also imitator, striver, follower of Christ, etc.¹²⁸ The other reservation is regarding the necessity of suffering for the Christian life. The initial presentation of suffering as not indispensable for being a Christian¹²⁹ seems to be problematic if related to Kierkegaard’s concept of being joyous in suffering—a hallmark of true Christianity—which requires suffering (“in elucidating the occasions for joy in following Christ...suffering is essential [and] suffering contains prospects of joy, but joy elicits suffering in turn”).¹³⁰

The situation gets complicated in a progressive manner if we see these difficulties in the light of each other. First, various (unqualified) forms of imitation

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-4 and pp. 152-4. “the prototype of Christian suffering”.

¹²⁸ See for example p. 133. “Jesus Christ is introduced as the *paradigm for Christian* sufferers, inasmuch as *being a Christian means to follow Christ*, assuming ‘the lowly form of a servant, indigent, forsaken, mocked, not loving the world and not loved by it,’ walking the same road he walked, taking up the cross, and bearing it daily in self-denial. In the eyes of the world *Christian strivers* will be considered *fools* and regarded as *wretched* because, like Christ, they do not strive for worldly advantages but choose *trouble and hardship* instead.” Italics mine.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134. “Christian strivers should prepare themselves for it in case the need arises.”

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-6. Although we can reconcile two opposing presentations of Christ and Christianity as cruelty, extremism and love and leniency, that can be seen in the very method of Kierkegaard’s dialectics, a similar dialectics does not qualify the requirement of suffering, and as we will see, martyrdom.

are considered in relation to several forms of suffering (guilty and innocent, parallel and un-parallel to Christ's suffering) despite the previous qualifications of the types of suffering as truly Christian. Moreover, if we consider Walsh's account of Kierkegaard's understanding of martyrdom in reference to the imitation of Christ and suffering, the above-presented conundrum seems to be even more puzzling. Although Walsh stresses that Kierkegaard's insistence upon suffering and martyrdom is set against "the laxity that had prevailed and resulted in the dethroning and abolishing of true Christianity...even if one does not become a martyr, to follow Christ must mean at least to actually incur suffering 'in a way akin to Christ's suffering,' which is 'to suffer evil at the hands of people.'"¹³¹ Having said that, one notices that to follow Christ here is to incur suffering "at the hand of people," which is tantamount with Walsh's distinction of innocent suffering. If this however "is akin to Christ suffering," then it does not agree with Christ's suffering as eternally different from ours and therefore Christ is not a pattern for imitation therein. Additionally, martyrdom is presented as something dispensable to being a Christian ("Kierkegaard stops short of suggesting that Christians are required to follow Christ in suffering to the point of allowing themselves to be put to death for the truth"¹³²), which seems problematic in view of Kierkegaard's journal entries that equate Christianity and martyrdom.¹³³ Walsh indirectly supports her agenda by means of referencing Thulstrup's "Søren Kierkegaards Martyrbegreb," which sees martyrdom—which Thulstrup presents there as "bloodless"—as part of witnessing to the truth, which itself represents "the concept of a Christian."¹³⁴ Interestingly, that seems to be also problematic with Thulstrup's account of the imitation of Christ, suffering and martyrdom presented in the already extensively discussed "Kierkegaard's Dialectics of Imitation."

An attempt for a more synthetic and methodical consideration of the imitation of Christ appears in Walsh's *Thinking Christianly in an Existential Mode*, in the section "Christ as Paradox, Redeemer, Prototype." After discussing Christ as the absolute sign of contradiction, which emphasizes the representational dimension of

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145. Italics mine. Although "in a way" might be a key phrase here, still the problem is not fully discussed.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹³³ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 1, p. 190, entry 481 (SKS 20, 392; NB5:48).

"Being a Christian is neither more nor less, absolutely neither more nor less, than being a martyr...Becoming a Christian is an examination established by God."

¹³⁴ Following Walsh, "Standing at the Crossroads," p. 145.

Christ,¹³⁵ the author comes up with a slightly different consideration of the problematic relation between Christ *qua* redeemer and *qua* prototype; she notices these two dimensions are to be understood as both dialectical and complementary.¹³⁶ Crucial is the substitutive understanding of Christ as redeemer and Christ's love, which has its realization in sacrifice and which in itself links His redeeming and prototypical dimension.¹³⁷

Apart from mounting difficulties that arise from Walsh's attempts to clarify the relation between Christ as paradox, redeemer, and prototype, the reader is offered a new approach to the subject of Christ as the prototype. The author explains Kierkegaard's emphasis upon Christ as the prototype in relation to two interrelated causes, theological and historical. First, Kierkegaard's agenda is "to make somewhat distinguishable what it means to be a Christian,"¹³⁸ and therefore to challenge the understanding of Christianity as a doctrine and scientific scholarship. Second, Kierkegaard is seen as working in line with a continuous corrective religious movement, which aimed at maintaining the genuine image of Christianity. As Luther's emphasis on grace worked as a counterweight to the rigorous law of the Middle Ages, so Kierkegaard's stressing Christ as the prototype and the requirement of imitation counterbalances Luther's grace taken in vain by "the secular mentality."¹³⁹ This historical perspective becomes visible again in her brief but informative analysis of "what does it mean for Christ to be a prototype."¹⁴⁰ "The notion of a prototype" as is to be generally understood, "is associated with being an archetype or original pattern, model, form, or ideal of some kind."¹⁴¹ So understood, the prototype becomes available to Kierkegaard in two developments: Christian and philosophical. The former has both biblical and patristic roots, especially developed in

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129. "To be a sign means that something is different from what it immediately is; to be a sign of contradiction...is the opposite of what it immediately is or appears to be."

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131. "[T]he dual roles of Christ as the redeemer and prototype of human beings are equally if not more important [for Kierkegaard] in his understanding of Christ [and] the role of Christ as prototype...always stands in a complementary dialectical relation to his role as redeemer. Thus each role must be viewed in tandem with the other."

¹³⁷ The relation between Christ as the redeemer and the pattern is so important for Kierkegaard that, as Walsh enigmatically indicates, *Ibid.*, p. 138, "Kierkegaard even interprets the atonement itself as pointing to Christ as our prototype and example inasmuch as the vicarious satisfaction with which we 'put on Christ' means not only to appropriate his merit for the forgiveness of our sins but also to seek to be like him, to borrow his clothes, so to speak, so as 'to re-present him.'" This however is hardly an explanation of the problem of the relation between Christ *qua* redeemer and *qua* the pattern.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-9.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

the Middle Ages by figures like Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, Thomas à Kempis, and Johannes Tauler; it emphasizes obedience, self-giving and suffering in the Christian life.¹⁴²

The philosophical understanding of prototype is analyzed in the works of Kant and Schleiermacher and so brushes aside the Platonic understanding of the prototype greatly emphasized in the work analyzed earlier. For Kant, Christ is predominantly an example of moral perfection, which, as it has a universal dimension, can be found in any human individual. Consequently, the physical existence of Jesus Christ, the example that comes from his historical life, is disregarded in these respects. For Schleiermacher, Christ is “the ideal embodiment of absolute perfection, by virtue of which he is the redeemer who brings the life-giving and person-forming power of God to the human race, and the exemplar of perfected human nature by virtue of the constant potency of his God-consciousness.”¹⁴³ Here, Christ is the exemplar of flawless and impeccable life, but also of universal God-consciousness. So understood, Christ is the pinnacle of the actualized innate possibility of sinless life that represents human perfection.

Although it is not clearly stated by Walsh, these two perspectives, theological and philosophical, within certain limits, become important points of departure for Kierkegaard for several reasons. Christ’s earthly life is the model for Christian life because, in obedience, He went through periods of spiritual and physical suffering and abasement to be ultimately “exalted as the prototype.”¹⁴⁴ This shows that Christ defines human beings as spiritual entities in the process of becoming. Walsh understands the imitation of Christ following Dewey as “discipleship, or, more literally, following after Christ, [of which] the image of [Christ’s] lowliness and abasement...is decidedly...the basis.”¹⁴⁵

Lastly, the author turns to the famous opposition of imitation versus admiration from *Practice in Christianity*. In that section she links admiration with the idea that “the prototype ‘has become merely an idea of the race.’”¹⁴⁶ The fact that Christ is not in a close vicinity of the imitator as the single individual makes one into

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

an admirer who, in his venerated admiration of the prototype, becomes inwardly detached from Him and from the very act of imitation.

In conclusion, apart from the negative qualification of the imitation of Christ (“Christ does not function altogether *literally* or *directly* as a pattern or example for human beings”¹⁴⁷) and an emphasis upon “the inverse dialectic” involved in it and the need for grace (“the chief function of Christ as prototype for Kierkegaard is ‘to teach us how infinitely far away we are from resembling the ideal’ and thus ‘to teach us how greatly we need grace’”¹⁴⁸), Walsh does not explain what the actual merit of the imitation of Christ is and how it translates into the practical sphere of human life.

Joel D. S. Rasmussen’s *Between Irony and Witness. Kierkegaard’s Poetics of Faith, Hope, and Love*¹⁴⁹ offers an extensive and thorough analysis of the problem of imitation by rendering it as a crucial part of Kierkegaard’s religious poetics, understanding of which requires reading it in conversation with his contemporaries. Rasmussen’s analysis of Kierkegaard’s religious poetics is studied in relation with and to *mimesis* (among other phenomena), especially considering the problem of relativization of imitation typical to the early German Romantics.¹⁵⁰ Consequently, although Kierkegaard’s imitation is distinct as a concept, it is heavily influenced by the continuing discussions of the role and status of *mimesis* throughout the history of philosophy and art, to which as we will see, Kierkegaard greatly contributes.

Rasmussen justifies Kierkegaard’s stressing of the imitation of Christ by appealing to two interrelated components. First—as Dewey, Ferreira and Walsh identified and elaborated—it is Kierkegaard’s method of existential re-appropriation of the Christian narrative into the daily life of single individuals, the hallmark of Kierkegaard’s genuine Christianity. The second component is the historical and contextual dimension of his writings, which is the explanation that has not been so far taken under consideration in reference to Kierkegaard’s emphasis on imitation. So understood, Kierkegaard’s writings are seen as engagements in the conversation concerning *mimesis* led by his contemporaries. His emphasis on the imitation of Christ “mark[s] the culmination of [his] intentional discontinuity with early German

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Joel D. S. Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness. Kierkegaard’s Poetics of Faith, Hope, and Love*, New York: T&T Clark 2005.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Romanticism and speculative idealism...”¹⁵¹ More important, it is an assault on the Romantic ideal of “originality.” The idea under attack was the Romantic criticism of “literature as representation of reality, as imitation, as *mimesis*,”¹⁵² typical to the classics and especially neo-classic inheritors. For the Romantics the reason behind literary production was not creating in reference to a given reality but rather a process that yielded “a new world” and “a new subject,” both unrestricted by reality.¹⁵³ A similar expectation qualified the anticipated end product of such an undertaking. Kierkegaard’s “resuscitation” of the concept of the imitation of Christ, is, according to Rasmussen, an attempt to challenge the understanding of *mimesis* by the early German Romantics, but also a criticism of the idea of human unconditional autonomy in creativity,¹⁵⁴ that translates itself into non-concreteness, living in the abstract (aesthetic dimension) and contempt for the real world (ethical dimension).¹⁵⁵ In Rasmussen’s terms, ultimately, what Kierkegaard offers is redefining the Romantic ideal of “living poetically” in an idea of “existential striving within a ‘poetic production’ that God creates.”¹⁵⁶

The romantics believed that only an ideological cessation from the classics and neo-classics could secure these hopes. The general criticism of the Romantics—to which Kierkegaard subscribes to a point and that Rasmussen clearly indicates—is not the fact that there is no break with the classical and neo-classical reading of *mimesis*, but the fact that the break is absolute, and no continuation between them occurs. Kierkegaard’s criticism of the Romantic *mimesis* does not consist in its absolute rejection, especially including the Romantic affectations for the inimitable, non-repeatable and indescribable, but rather in offering an alternative understanding of the concept that can successfully secure these pretenses.¹⁵⁷

Kierkegaard’s imitation is a synthesis that appeals to three readings of *mimesis*: (1) the classical and neo-classical, (2) the medieval, and (3) the Romantic. The classical *mimesis* refers to the concepts of Plato and Aristotle. For the former,

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-4 and pp. 137-8.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* “Kierkegaard’s alternative, by contrast, promotes an idiosyncratic synthesis of the classical (and neoclassical) theory of *mimesis* with the Christian ideal of *imitatio Christi* and shows that *mimesis* is not inimical to pathos and the experience of the inimitable, but can actually foster the limit- experience that Johannes Climacus called ‘the passion of the understanding’ and that Anti-Climacus simply calls ‘faith.’”

mimesis described the nature of art, which is representation in accordance with a model. In the world that consists of the immutable ideas, their physical representations in the world, and lastly, the artistic representations of the material objects, *mimesis* described the relation between the last two. Therefore, *mimesis* is in its *verity* “thrice removed from truth.” As Rasmussen notices following Thomas Gould, Plato’s criticism of poetry pertains to unethical engagement of *mimesis* not only in art but also in education and the daily life of the citizens of the polis.

Aristotle, according to Rasmussen, although having a more positive reading of imitation on the one hand, limits it to art on the other. In that, however, the philosopher identifies “(1) different means, (2) different objects, and (3) different methods of imitation.”¹⁵⁸ Further, Rasmussen identifies that these understandings influence the New Testament renderings of imitation, especially of the Apostle Paul.¹⁵⁹

Such enriched understanding culminates in the Middle Ages’ tradition of *imitatio Christi*, where imitation is understood as an intellectual and practical undertaking in conforming one’s life with the life of Christ, which is the second understanding. This way of cultivating oneself is not equal to and does not conform to scholastic deliberations, but rather falls back on the Greek model of mimetic *paideia*.¹⁶⁰ These understandings are at hand for Kierkegaard, who is far from being uncritical, despite being exposed to them and generally granting them positive appraisals. Rasmussen notices that together with the Reformation, which focused on critical reading of Scripture and on interpretation that aimed at showing that “the gospel story is a story in terms of which an individual can mimetically emplot his or her own life,”¹⁶¹ came a reading that emphasized its philological breadth. Someone who takes stock of that is Lessing, who contends that the historical truth cannot be demonstrated, or that historical facts are not ultimately evidences for religious and metaphysical truths.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 115. See for example: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1) and “You became imitators of us and of the Lord” (1 Thess. 1:6).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

The third reading of *mimesis* would be what Rasmussen, referring to Walter Ong's "From Mimesis to Irony,"¹⁶³ on the reverse calls "from *mimesis* through irony to imitation."¹⁶⁴ Being on the same page with the Romantics and availing himself of irony Kierkegaard criticizes a natural human propensity to imitation. At the same time, by controlling the ironic momentum, he directs the individual to real life existence. Away from mere copying, a human being is directed towards a "reflective attempt to imitate in daily living the 'criterion' and 'goal' of human life as expressed by God in Christ."¹⁶⁵ The Romantic "living poetically" is here combined with the art of living, presented in Møller's theory of "true art." While the first is not possible without the power of imagination, which is the ability to poetize oneself to be a human being and more importantly to see God as the ultimate poet, the second is not possible without the engagement of the volitional aspect, that is one's willingness to fashion one's life on Christ's.¹⁶⁶

Focusing on Kierkegaard's pseudonymous *Practice in Christianity*, Rasmussen notices that the work itself depicts imaginatively the "requirement of ideality," which is "the life of Christ as the 'prototype' and 'criterion' for personal imitation," and in that sense the book is poetic.¹⁶⁷ It seems that although such an approach is consistent with Kierkegaard's methodology when he depicts the ideal aesthetic and ethical life, it is nevertheless problematic when it comes to depicting the ideal of religious life through producing "fundamentally the imaginative depiction of an ideal."¹⁶⁸ Moreover, can the requirement of ideality, which understands the life of Christ as criterion and prototype, be depicted imaginatively, especially considering the fact that, as Rasmussen rightly points out, "Christ is the prototype and criterion for imitation, according to Anti-Climacus, because Christ 'is the truth in the sense that to be the truth is the only true explanation of what truth is.'"¹⁶⁹ These issues seem to be without a definitive identification and answer.

Further down, Rasmussen, pointing to the etymological dimension of Danish imitation (*Efterfølgelse*), reclaims its original evangelical meaning of "following after Christ." This, materialized in a very informative footnote, sheds important light on

¹⁶³ Walter J. Ong, "From Mimesis to Irony: The Distancing Voice," *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1976, pp. 1-24.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

Kierkegaard's insistence upon differentiating imitation from admiring. The former requires a particular "relationship between imagination and actuality in an individual's life [in the process of] the embodiment of Christ's life in one's own," where the latter can appreciate imagination and actuality as unrelated.¹⁷⁰ Stressing imitation over knowledge, Anti-Climacus presents Christ as the teacher of humankind, whose teaching consists in his life, not a doctrine that can be conceptualized and grasped in cognition. Rasmussen succinctly phrases this in: "Christianity...is a revelation that instructs on how to live truly, not a revelation that enables comprehension of its truth."¹⁷¹

However, in explaining what the imitation of Christ is, the very understanding of imitation is deferred; Rasmussen quotes from Anti-Climacus: "truly to be a Christian means to be [Christ's] imitator . . . ; [it] means that your life has as much similarity to his as is possible for a human life to have."¹⁷² If we go back a few pages, we find a similar case where Rasmussen quoting from the same author juxtaposes imitation with admiration: "If we have dozed off into this infatuation, wake us up, rescue us from this error of wanting to admire or adoringly admire you instead of wanting to follow you and be like [*ligne*] you."¹⁷³ Although imitation is explained by looking into its etymology as following after Christ, we are left uninstructed what being like Christ is. Therefore the full meaning of "wanting to follow you and be like you" is left unrevealed, and deferred.

Another important dimension of Kierkegaard's understanding of the imitation of Christ appears in his critique of the human endeavors to represent Christ, especially in aesthetics. As humans think through images and ideas, they are incapable of representing Christ truly, which is in His existence, because especially art cannot grasp Christ's suffering. As no artist has the ability to depict Christ in His fullness, Christ had to "depict" himself in his own life. Although there is a chronological problem (without Christ's self-revelation there would be no attempt to depict Him),

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-5; See also pp. 141-2: "It is possible to imagine the ideal without striving to imitate it, but it is not possible to imitate the ideal without first having an imaginative relation to it. Said another way, despite the assertion that imagination taken alone has a misrelation to actuality, Anti-Climacus nevertheless believes that when one decides to 'replicate' the image one has of Christ by willing to become like him ('he is indeed a requirement upon me to him back in replica' (PC, 198), he or she comes to exist authentically. Nonetheless, what is ultimately 'decisive' for how one exists in relationship to divine truth is action, for existence is a matter not simply of imagination but also of enacting the imaginative ideal."

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-6.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

one can see that in that context the distinction between admirers and imitation reappears, and the meaning of imitation is being deferred again by phrases “become like him” and “closely resemble the life of ‘the prototype.’”¹⁷⁴

Acknowledging Kierkegaard’s ambivalent relation to *imitatio Christi*, Rasmussen points to the fact that Kierkegaard admits the advantages of the pietistic tradition’s understanding of the imitation of Christ over the detached and passive Christianity of his contemporaries. Nevertheless, the counterbalance of that Kierkegaard sees in one’s need for grace that is “preserved” by our inability to fully imitate Christ.¹⁷⁵ Appealing to the understanding of the imitation of Christ presented by Thulstrup, Dewey and, most notably, by Walsh, the author emphasizes the demanding nature of imitation and the forgiving nature of Christ, but also the state of humility and the paradoxicality of the Christian truth to which the imitation of Christ ultimately directs us—as discussed by Ferreira.

Christopher B. Barnett’s *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*,¹⁷⁶ marks another important vantage point on Kierkegaard’s imitation. Barnett’s reading of the phenomenon in question appears precisely in relationship to the socio-religious movement of Pietism, in which the Dane was brought up, and its literary productions, which influenced his authorship. The main idea behind his reading of Kierkegaard’s imitation is that it has its origins in the theme running through pietistic literature—*imitatio Christi*—and that is itself a development of that idea.

Barnett starts his investigation explaining how Lutheranism turned out to be acquainted and, to a certain extent, seduced by *Catholic Erbauungsliteratur*. Concentrating on the figures of Johann Arndt and Philipp Jacob Spener and their reading of *imitatio Christi*, Barnett elucidates how Pietism was rooted in Denmark in the form of the two fractions, Halle Pietism and *Brødresocietet*, and how Kierkegaard became well acquainted with *Erbauungsliteratur*. In relation to that, Barnett asks: “What did [Kierkegaard] find in these writings, particularly as regards the theme of *imitatio Christi*?”¹⁷⁷

To imitate Christ, according to Tauler, the author of the *Imitation of the Poor Life of Christ*, means “the manner in which human beings are to devote themselves to

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Christopher B. Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2011.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

the Godhead [as] demonstrated in the life [of Christ], and especially in his Passion.”¹⁷⁸ Christ is the *Vorbild*, and one has to imitate Christ’s “humble forgetfulness of the self,” “‘true submission’ to God’s will,” love for God and neighbor. This attitude of “poverty” will not result in one’s ability to actually be in Christ-likeness, but in God’s enabling a person to “imitate Christ in stricter fashion.”¹⁷⁹ For Henry Suso *imitatio Christi* was equal with *imitatio passionis*; he therefore understands it in various practices of mortification. The author of the *Theologia Deutsch* contends “Christ is the embodiment of ‘true obedience’ who himself demonstrates that a person ‘must put aside all *selfdom* and concern with the *Self*.’”¹⁸⁰ Thomas à Kempis translates Eckhart’s *Gelassenheit*, understood as a metaphysical or spiritual principle, into a practical lifestyle.¹⁸¹ To imitate Christ, according to the author of *The Imitation of Christ*, is to be engrossed in practicing humility, prudence, obedience, mutual love and diligence—virtues perfected by the prototype—but also to welcome suffering and strife as a way of life.¹⁸² Arndt’s reading of the concept is more complex and syncretic. It results from faith that is built on a new life “in Christ” that is also a life of “Christ in us.” This new life is what the author of *True Christianity* calls, referring to his predecessors, “the new obedience” that is also characterized by surrendering one’s will, *Gelassenheit*, embracing one’s nothingness and welcoming of suffering, and renunciation of the self.¹⁸³ Christ is the Saviour [*Heiland*] and *Vorbild*. Tersteegen’s rendering of the subject entails “active Christian discipleship...through the individual’s self-effacement before God”, but also withdrawing from the world, and—modeling one’s life on Christ as *Vorbild* on the cross—“exposing oneself to hardship and to persecution.”¹⁸⁴ H.A. Brorson’s hymnbooks were another important influence on Kierkegaard’s reading of the imitation of Christ. His texts often contemplate the images of the crucified Christ, and underscore the imperative role of grace in the imitation of Christ through the love of the neighbor, humility, and the essential nature of grace.¹⁸⁵

The Socratic elements in Pietism can be found in the works of Zinzendorf—never directly quoted by Kierkegaard—and Hamann, who was often directly and

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-1.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-3.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 74-5.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-3.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 85-6.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-8.

indirectly praised by Kierkegaard in his oeuvre. For Zinzendorf, a great reader of Blaise Pascal, the Socratic was to show the “inquisitive role of faith” and the limits of philosophy, where “the philosophical enterprise is never self-sufficient.”¹⁸⁶ Hamann’s development of Zinzendorf’s *Der Deutsche Sokrates*, points to the negative of the Socratic preceding the positive of the Gospel;¹⁸⁷ Moreover, Hamann’s *Socratic Memorabilia* is “an imitation of Socratic philosophizing...[because it is written] ‘in a Socratic manner.’”¹⁸⁸ For Kierkegaard, Hamann’s reading of Socrates, although important and evident in the Dane’s writings, especially in *The Concept of Irony*, is erroneous in not distinguishing the Socratic and Christian. Only the latter is concerned with the transcendent and requires imitating Christ.

After scrutinizing Kierkegaard’s exposure to *Erbauungsliteratur* and the Pietistic treatment of the theme of *imitatio Christi*, Barnett embarks upon Kierkegaard’s concept of the imitation of Christ, which itself is a development of that motif, especially in the so-called “second authorship.” His presentation is set against claims leveled by Thulstrup and Rasmussen who, according to the author, see the *telos* of imitation inevitably in martyrdom and sacrifice. Barnett’s position is rooted in reading Kierkegaard’s imitation as a concept that, although an advancement on *imitatio Christi*, itself undergoes a development. Furthermore, it is to be understood in a similar manner as in the works of Dewey and Walsh as entailing the relationship between an imitator and grace.¹⁸⁹

In short, Barnett’s understanding of imitation is based on the imitator’s imitation of particular aspects of the kenotic nature of Christ. The life of Christ is primarily an undertaking of his self-emptying to death. It has theological, ethical and anthropological dimensions, whereby the last two have the heaviest bearings on the imitation of Christ for the Dane. For Barnett, the imitation of Christ “instructs” how to be a Christian, which for Kierkegaard is a process that leads to “reliance on God’s grace.” In conclusion to his elaborated exposition of the phenomenon in question, Barnett says: “It is in this absolute reliance on God’s grace that one begins to resemble Christ himself, who incarnated a human life wholly receptive to God’s gifts, a human life lovingly at rest in God.”¹⁹⁰ This however is a complicated endeavor,

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-1.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-1.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

which as I will show below, in Barnett's explanation lacks a clear presentation of the volitional dimension of the involved imitator.

Starting his presentation of the imitation of Christ as early in Kierkegaard's authorship as in his *The Gospel of Sufferings*, Barnett contends that imitation is a process of self-denial that "is *fundamentally* social and political."¹⁹¹ In that sense, he challenges Thulstrup's and Walsh's appraisals of the phenomenon in question, who principally argue for an inward character of Kierkegaard's imitation, and endorses Dewey's idea of the concept as having both inward and outward dimensions. Therefore Barnett's reading of imitation is dialectical (Barnett does not use that term—so essential to Walsh's reading—in that context). First, the outward and temporal undertaking of imitating Christ—putting God and neighbor above oneself—is complemented by the imitator's experience of "another world...another kingdom, which is characterized by 'blessedness.'"¹⁹² Hence the metaphysical dimension of imitation. Second, "the life of self-surrender and earthly powerlessness is not one of abject misery, but one of confidence and even joyfulness...['justified' by Christ himself]."¹⁹³ Lastly, one knows nothing about the imitation of Christ prior to one's active involvement in it, that is, prior to imitation.¹⁹⁴

Although the imitator's will, as Barnett explains, is to be subjugated to God's will up to the point where "the imitator has no...real purpose except to fulfil the eternal Will,"¹⁹⁵ the author does not explain whether the will to imitate God is something that the imitator has control over, and if so, to what extent. It seems that the problem of will hovers unresolved over Barnett's presentation of the imitation of Christ in Kierkegaard *in toto*, it also impinges upon his reading of the problem of martyrdom.

Barnett notices that suffering for the truth leads to martyrdom, which is "a tendency that stems from [Kierkegaard's] understanding of *imitatio Christi*."¹⁹⁶ It is so for the reason that the boldness of powerlessness of the imitator and their dismissal of moderation in Christian life creates an opposition and is received by society as offensive. And as it was with Christ, who "emptied himself of selfishness...and gave up all pursuits of temporal glory," so it is with Christians who stay true to themselves

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

at whatever cost, including being put to death as martyrs.¹⁹⁷ Barnett decides that martyrdom is not an inevitable part of witnessing to the truth. On the one hand, it is up to God to motivate/compel the believer to such an act or not (“It depends on the way in which one is moved by and for God”¹⁹⁸). On the other hand, availing himself of an understanding of the essay written by H.H., Barnett remarks that one’s willingness to die for the truth compromises the fullness of love as it casts the guilt of putting an innocent to death on the perpetrators (“So powerless is the *Efterfølger* that he is forbidden to pursue a martyrdom unto death”).¹⁹⁹ He concludes, “martyrdom as the consummation of Christian existence...is a misunderstanding of the true nature of *imitatio Christi*.”²⁰⁰ Still however martyrdom is not ultimately impermissible. On the one hand we have the martyrdom of insult and ridicule, which is surprisingly according to the author, not “a softer, easygoing Christianity”; on the other hand, martyrdom is the highest representation of one’s Christianity when the martyr being put to death neither seeks it nor “thinks he has permission to let that happen.”²⁰¹

Barnett comes back again to the subject of the relationship between the imitation of Christ and its volitional dimension putting forward the ideas of grace, venturing, and risk. What is important in imitation is the need for grace and one realizes the indispensability of grace in the imitation of Christ from an understanding of one’s imperfection. It seems that the volitional aspect is being considered here, although implicitly; initially, the imitator’s will is a decisive factor for starting the whole business of imitation—one has to will to imitate Christ, one has to “venture”—however the human will has its limits that can be expounded only by grace. Facing one’s imperfection, in honesty and humility one can see the limits of their willingness to imitate Christ as imitation truly requires. This limitation can be transcended by the grace that changes the human will and creates a new will in accordance with God’s, something beyond human capacity. Looking at it from a different angle, grace is a result of letting go, *Gelassenheit*, of self-love and one’s knowledge and ability to imitate Christ, relying on what is known and certain. Consequently, grace, in a certain way, results from one’s volitional capacity. Moreover, as wanting to imitate Christ is to “venture”—(not to just discuss imitation, because deliberations inevitably lead to

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-7.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 187-8.

doubts, and dismissal of action)—but also to “abandon” the certain, and embracing the uncertain (so characteristic of the life of Christ), it seems that imitation is decisively tied with one’s volitional capacity.²⁰²

Showing that Christ’s divine nature was hidden from people’s sight as he was cloaked in his self-denial, Barnett appeals to divine hiddenness. Clinging to Christ’s offer of fulfilling people’s needs in the wake of his abasement and powerlessness created contrast and eventually produced offense. As a lowly servant Christ became unrecognizable therefore securing the “non-idolizing” relationship with his followers, which otherwise would stop at the externalities. So also is the life of the believer, who may not be identified as a true Christian in society; indeed, direct recognizability goes against the true nature of a Christian.

Lastly, as the embodiment of the qualities of the ideal imitator Barnett presents “the woman who was a sinner” from two of Kierkegaard’s discourses; she is “a model of Christian piety, she is both a picture [Billede] and prototype [Forbillede] of godliness.”²⁰³ The woman who was a sinner represents someone who fully relies on God, being on the one hand ultimately preoccupied with her sin and not having pride in her might and abilities, and on the other hand, believing that God conquered sin. Moreover, the woman “stands as a fine example of Christian venture. She neither wills to suffer nor aims to expose the mercilessness of the Pharisees. Her only self-concern was to give herself to Christ; [and therefore] her love of Love.”²⁰⁴

Problematic in his appraisal of the figure of the woman is the fact that by being “the ideal imitator” she “demands” imitation, as she “teaches” us how to be a genuine Christian. So rendered, the woman who was a sinner is both a means and object of imitation, she imitates and is to be imitated. This proves challenging while discussing the imitation of Christ as entailing another or supportive type of imitation, which begs the question of a plurality of imitative models and the relationship between them.

3. Contextualized appraisals: contemporary perspectives

William Schweiker’s *Mimetic Reflections: A Study in Hermeneutics, Theology and Ethics* situates Kierkegaard’s imitation in a broad contemporary debate on *mimesis*.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 191-2.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-8.

The work itself is a reading of the works of Kierkegaard, Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, in relation to their formulations of the problematic of *mimesis*. Although they are presented as deeply interconnected, undoubtedly Schweiker's reading of Kierkegaard's *mimesis* is deeply influenced by the two thinkers.

In this very complex and penetrating study, Schweiker identifies understandings of *mimesis* shared by the authors respectively, situates them in their conversational contexts, and extracts from them aspects relevant to the contemporary discussion on *mimesis*. Despite the general recent disapproval for “classical and modernist mimeticism,”²⁰⁵ that is characterized “by the breakdown of what me meant by ‘image’ and of specific images we have used in understanding ourselves”²⁰⁶ and the world, and in the rendering of *mimesis* as correspondence to “reality,” Schweiker believes that *mimesis* is *still* crucial for a true and meaningful existence in the world with others.

His investigation of *mimesis* is dictated by the fact that the notion of imitation/*mimesis* has always been either a crucial part of or aimed at explaining the Western world, including its culture, thought, practice and human relationships. The two main understandings of *mimesis* are “imitation” understood as intellectual undertaking achieved “by the logic of representation”²⁰⁷ but also the performative dimension of imitation, where the second understanding is (most likely) antecedent to the former. As humans are “symbol-using and –interpreting agents [on] a quest for meaning carried out through language and action,”²⁰⁸ availing themselves of representation allows for gaining power over what is being represented; thus *mimesis* is a political tool. Schweiker's project of *reviving mimesis*—based on an understanding of *mimesis* as an act of “figuration”—concentrates on reclaiming its performative origins that will allow for a different relation towards the self and Being,

²⁰⁵ Schweiker, *Mimetic Reflections*, pp. 5-6. “Throughout much of the Western intellectual tradition imitation was used to render conceptual and perceptual chaos into an harmonious universe of thought and value. Texts were seen as the imitation of nature or of an author's intentions and genius. The moral life was to be the imitation of the “good man,” the gods, or the One God. And the world was a theatre of God's glory, the shadows or images of divine things, so that, armed with a sacred texts, one could read the world in order to speak analogically about the divine purposes. The human stood amid an imitative and symbolic universe and interpreted itself in tis matrix of meaning. What is more, every aspect of reality derived its purpose and value from its cosmic station. The power of imitation was that it allowed one to see the connections of meanings, world, value and God, and hence, to articulate an ordered existence. The order was strict but elusive because the various levels of reality more or less mirrored each other.”

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

rendering them “meaningful.”²⁰⁹ Here the act of “figuration” is read against understanding of *mimesis* (imitation) as copying or referencing. Texts and our readings do not merely attempt at copying the world, but generate new meanings.²¹⁰ So understood, *mimesis* provides us with means for critical articulation of the range of problems that it entails, but it also supplies us with resources indispensable to reason and act with, but also beyond *mimesis*.²¹¹

Schweiker’s exposition of Kierkegaard’s concept of imitation has three dimensions. First, the author shows that it is both influenced by “ontological and aesthetic uses of imitation”²¹² and is a continuation of the biblical rendering of imitation.²¹³ Second, his presentation of imitation is focused on the moral and religious dimension of the human self; as Schweiker contends, the quintessence of imitation in Kierkegaard exhibits “a mimetic interpretation of human selfhood.”²¹⁴ Lastly, he contends that the religious-existential *mimesis* offered by Kierkegaard does not limit the human and her capacities, but “is a way of authentic existence.”²¹⁵ Kierkegaard’s rendering and development of *imitatio Christi* contributes to Schweiker’s project of reconstruction of *mimesis*, which the author understands as “an alternative interpretation of *mimesis* enriched by modern and contemporary critiques of imitation seeking to inform understanding and action.”²¹⁶

However, in what follows I will focus on the second dimension of Schweiker’s account of imitation in Kierkegaard, and in relation to which, I would like to briefly elaborate on the biblical framework for reading of the phenomenon in question. In his investigation, Schweiker goes back to the Hebrew Scriptures, therefore offering a picture larger and more far reaching than the one presented by the accounts examined so far. First he identifies three ways? of “following the divine” in the Tanakh and points they have been attributed by the Gospels to Jesus. Second, he indicates that availing oneself of the accounts of imitation presented by both Testaments, we arrive at an imitative pair *imago/imitatio*. Following E. J. Tinsley,

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6. “In fact, the most powerful texts, events, experiences, and actions, do not so much copy the world as refigure it. The travail of interpretation is to explore the clash of meanings that texts and events generate, not their simple correspondence to reality.”

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5.

Schweiker says: “the three ways [of biblical imitation] include the way of Torah (moral and religious edification through following the commands of God), the way of “Sonship” (concrete discipleship modeled on the Israelite kings), and the way of Wisdom (discerning God’s purpose through nature, history, and society).”²¹⁷ The New Testament reading of Jesus and His disciples clearly is modeled on the first two ways of following the divine.²¹⁸ Moreover, Paul’s rendering of the image of God is to be found in Christ, understood as “the true ‘icon’ of God.”²¹⁹ And while we are created in the image of God, therefore holding the image in ourselves, we are to realize that image in our lives. The imitative pair *imago/imitatio* has practical and therefore ethical dimensions,²²⁰ and such a constructed ethical *I* becomes meaningful through mimetic practice in the mimetically understood world.²²¹

Having said that the *I* has a mimetic task, the *I* itself has to be mimetic. And indeed, Schweiker believes that Kierkegaard attempts that problem offering a mimetic interpretation of human selfhood, and at the same time showing that the self, although outlined in reference to Christ in Kierkegaard’s texts, “always comes to be relative to another.”²²² But what does it mean that Kierkegaard’s self is mimetic?

Schweiker avails himself of the understanding of *mimesis* as “figuration”—offered predominantly by Ricoeur. In his hermeneutics, Ricoeur maintains that our reading of a text requires a practical response to it through appropriation of the text in one’s existence. This being called by the author “refiguration,” is the final hermeneutic step that follows two others, “prefiguration” and succeeding it, “configuration.” “Prefiguration” “refers to the preunderstanding that one brings to writing or reading a text,”²²³ and subsequent act of “configuration” “refers on the one hand to an author’s imaginative construction of a text, particularly the emplotment, and on the other hand to the reader’s construal of the narrative world of the text.”²²⁴ In

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.* “The follower of Jesus was called to participate in his destiny by walking in the way of Christ as a teacher of the law and the Son of God.”

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21. “The conceptual matrix of *imago/imitatio* touches...on the being of the moral agent, the good, and guides for action and thought.”

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134 “World is not the imitation of transcendent ideas but a dynamic transformation into figuration through forms of mimetic action ranging from understanding to being a self.”

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²²³ Dan R. Stiver, *Theology After Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2001, p. 66.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

short, reading a text we reach a certain “world in front of the text,”²²⁵ and by appropriating that world into our existence, we refigure it, we make it our own by inhabiting it.

Having in mind the mimetic arc of “figuration,” Schweiker presents two interrelated orders of *mimesis*: authorship and selfhood. The former is mimetic for two reasons: the pseudonymous authors present modes of existence to be refigured and Kierkegaard’s oeuvre as a whole “opens possible worlds for the reader as crucial for the edification of the human.”²²⁶ Selfhood (existence) is mimetic, because “the self is the kinetic transformation of the *pathos* for life into a form of existence.”²²⁷

These mean that in his authorship, the Dane offers his readers a certain description of the truly human, and of the Christian. Subsequently, these descriptions are “configurations” of the human and the Christian, but to examine their content one has to attempt existential hermeneutics. On the one hand, the content of Kierkegaard’s authorship is the invitation to redoubling, in his language, and using Ricoeur’s, for “refiguration.” On the other, Schweiker reads Kierkegaard’s texts—especially *Training in Christianity*—as a mimetic “configuration” of Christian existence. He says: “As a configuration of Christian existence, the text dips its roots into prefigured human existence, and calls for a concrete refiguration of life.”²²⁸

The *mimesis* of selfhood exhibits in this that a self allows for “figuration.” Hence, by bringing truth into existence a self comes-to-be as a self. So understood a self is not a substance, nor a simple given²²⁹ but a mimetic task of following “the pattern for the Christian retrospectively (in the past) and prospectively (in the future).”²³⁰ The reader’s response to the text may be positive or negative. One can merely reject Christ, can be offended or settle for being an admirer of Christ, not the follower. The follower strives after what she admires, but the admirer is content with distant contemplation, therefore their passion for existence is frustrated. Passion as such is not reserved for true Christians; it is in fact the foundation of the continuity of the self for Schweiker and the fundamental force of human life.²³¹ However, what Kierkegaard offers is the true *telos* of passion that is existence and enactment: “the

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²²⁶ Schweiker, *Mimetic Reflections*, p. 157.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-1.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

self is the figuration of passion for existence.”²³² Here we came back to the relation between the self and authorship. The former starts with passion and ends in presentation, the latter starts with presentation and aims at awakening or strengthening passion that will lead to the genuine life passion seeks.²³³

If the description of the Christian presented in *Training in Christianity*, which is an image of the suffering, abased and humiliated follower of Christ, is a rightful “configuration” of the Christian life, does it mean that what is required from the imitators is to abide by the rules of ascetic life? Schweiker seems to be ambivalent about that matter, noticing that the true life may and/or may not entail the extreme version of the Christian. In that sense his vision of suffering and martyrdom corresponds with Dewey’s, Barnett’s and to some extent, Walsh’s. What is at stake in Schweiker’s presentation of the mimetic shape of the Christian life is the specific dynamic of selfhood, “not a specific construal of how Christians should live their lives.”²³⁴ This seems to be in line with Ricoeur’s understanding of the surplus of meanings/”reconfigurations” generated by text in his hermeneutics, but appears somehow contrary to Kierkegaard’s strictness of interpretation on that matter especially presented in his late signed writings.

Moreover, it seems that Schweiker’s reading of Kierkegaard’s imitation is predominantly based on pseudonymous writings. Schweiker rightfully notices that the Dane “retreats behind his pseudonymous works” which “forces us to confront the text as it is given,” and “the pseudonymous works are mimetic.” Nonetheless, it seems that the fullness of Kierkegaard’s production cannot be completely appreciated without consideration for his signed writings. Kierkegaard himself advocated reading his pseudonymous and veronymous works as dialectically complementing each other. Moreover, one cannot imagine having a full picture of Kierkegaard’s imitation ignoring works as *For Self-Examination* and *Judge for Yourself*, with the chapter “Christ as the Prototype” off the table.

Also, Schweiker’s hermeneutic approach omits discussing the theological dimension of Kierkegaard’s imitation. Unclear are the consequences of the mimetic pair *imago Dei/imitatio Christi*—if humans are created in the image of God, imitating Christ who is the image of God, or imitating disciples in their imitation of Christ,

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 167.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

seems puzzling. Moreover, what does it really mean to imitate Christ who as God-man is not only a man, but also God, and therefore Savior and Redeemer—these deliberations, untackled by Schweiker, make part of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works and cover a substantial part of his journals. Lastly, Kierkegaard’s repeated invoking of the image as a means of communication (the ideal image of the Christian, the ideals, the image of the crucified Christ, etc), seems to be at odds with Schweiker’s claim of the Dane’s ultimate and univocal break with of “the logic of the image.”

Taken at face value, Patrick Stokes’ *Kierkegaard’s Mirrors. Interest, Self, and Moral Vision*²³⁵ may not appear to scholars, including the author himself, as a deliberation upon Kierkegaard’s *mimesis*. It is however an important source for the context of the present study for two reasons. First, Stokes furthers the investigation of the role imagination and reflection play in imitation (the subject tackled by Ferreira), especially their role in establishing or becoming the human self. Second, the work, while discussing the ethical dimension of human selfhood, subjectivity and agency, considers fundamental Kierkegaardian categories of image and mirror.

Discussing imagination and reflection in *Anti-Climacus*, Stokes notices that the latter has the transcendent nature—it goes beyond what is given—if “the reflector is an imaginative being. But if the self is to avoid despair,” Stokes continues, “the imagination must remain ‘grounded’ in reality; it must somehow relate itself back to the situation of the existing self.”²³⁶ The self has an ability to transcend itself in imaginative reflection, but its development progresses only if the self comes back to itself in that reflection. The reflection is imaginative and transcendent as it envisages oneself as different than one is, but the realization of that project must take place in the existing self. Although imagination goes beyond what is given, it is limited to the options that are truly possible to the self; otherwise, the self would be at risk of infinitization. Stokes continues, “any actualization of the self is dependent upon the subject’s ability to posit another, ideal self which it is to become.”²³⁷ Here we see that the self creates an image of what it *wants* to become in imagination and then comes to be that image. *How* and *why* does this act take place?

²³⁵ Patrick Stokes, *Kierkegaard’s Mirrors. Interest, Self, and Moral Vision*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

Although Stokes does not ask that question directly, as it is obviously not part of his examination, he explains that the act of “translating our imaginative activity into action”²³⁸ is part of our daily life; therefore we could say in short that it is something we humans *naturally* do. Moreover, this fact of the inherent propensity to first imagining and then actualizing certain images has a moral dimension, it is a task: “our imagined possibilities present themselves as possibilities *for us to actualize*.”²³⁹ The author notes that although one can create visions of oneself as successful or happy, there is no necessary connection between them and the positing self that recognizes them as possibilities to be actualized.²⁴⁰

It seems that the issue can be “resolved” if what we envisage in possibility appears as interesting to us, or if we find what we posit as interesting. It is important to notice that what we posit as our ideal selves is in a way already part of “what” we are in a phenomenal sense. Stokes explains: “While we are not the ideal self we posit...we are, in fact, co-identical with the selves we imagine [as] we find ourselves in what we imagine in a very real sense when that imagination is interested.”²⁴¹ Hence, the vision of oneself, although different from the actual self that stands behind that vision and orchestrated it, is not completely separate from the self. On the other hand, finding the ideal self as interesting means locating in the vision itself “an immediate, decisive phenomenal sense of self-involvement”²⁴² that Stokes calls “the experience...of being directly claimed by the imagined image.”²⁴³

Here we come to the point in which a strong mimetic link between being-becoming and imagination, imaging (visualizing) and image is revealed. Stokes’ rendering of the image does not go along “the logic of the image” presented and challenged by Schweiker, where the image is respectively a representation of something or that by which (original) referent is deferred, but offers a reading that emphasizes the ethical and phenomenological dimension of the image. Invoking the story of a youth’s relationship to and with “the image of perfection (ideal)”²⁴⁴ from *Practice in Christianity*, Stokes shows that the image-ideal conjured up by the youth “is not merely an illustration of some moral meaning...It is a ‘live conveyor of

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82. “Nothing in the representation *itself* refers us back to the imagining self.”

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Stokes quotes here from Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, p. 186 (SKS 12, 186).

meaning.”²⁴⁵ The youth’s engagement with the image-ideal has direct and individual dimension because it is presented to him and received as demanding actualization. Although the author notices that it is the imagination that enables the youth to “be at home with this image, which he desires to resemble,”²⁴⁶ Stokes does not explain *how* the youth resembles the picture. What is at stake here is the fact that what Anti-Climacus tries to emphasize is that resembling the image-ideal does not take place and is not fostered by imagination (only). Putting it differently, forging the image-ideal either from time and history, or not, and being at home with the image takes place through and in imagination, but not actually resembling it.

The decisive mimetic momentum in Stokes’ phenomenological rendering of the image-ideal (presenting itself to the subject as “*making demands in and of itself*”²⁴⁷) appears in his bracketed reformulation of the method of appropriation of the image-ideal by the youth: “The youth, who aspires to actualize (by imitating) the ideal he cherishes, is counterposed to the figure of the admirer, whose relation to the ideal never becomes self-reflexive.”²⁴⁸ What has been tacitly imported here is the understanding of actualizing of the ideal as imitation. Moreover, it seems that an answer for the unasked question, “How and why does this act of creating an image and then resembling it actually take place?” is to be found in “imitation.” Inability or failure to recognize the demand of the image is assigned to the admirer, who is juxtaposed with the imitator; the true imitator strives to be what she admires, but a mere admirer “keeps himself personally detached” from the image-ideal.

Nevertheless this mimetic structure can be ascribed to various ethical domains of human life, according to Stokes, not just its religious domain as presented by Anti-Climacus. The author explains that whenever I admire an ethical exemplar, simultaneously I am compelled to relate to it and express that in a practical way.²⁴⁹ The admirer maintains the attitude of personal detachment from the object of her admiration and fails to self-reflexively relate to what is admired. Conversely, the

²⁴⁵ Stokes, *Kierkegaard’s Mirrors*, p. 91.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.* Stokes quotes here from Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, p. 189 (SKS 12, 188).

²⁴⁷ Stokes, *Kierkegaard’s Mirrors*, p. 92.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* “Except where circumstances beyond my control make it impossible for me to try to emulate the object of my admiration—for instance, if I admire another’s good fortune or natural talents or beauty—that which I admire issues a demand that I am to try to resemble it. If I admire an ethical exemplar, such as the model of perfect goodness that the youth posits, then insofar as the ethical is the universally human, the exemplar exercises a claim upon me: ‘I am to resemble him, and *immediately* begin my striving to resemble him’ (PC, 242/SKS 12, 235).”

imitator in the appropriation of the ideal “experiences an immediate self-referentiality that infuses the perception of the admired one.”²⁵⁰

Lastly, Stokes discusses the human self in relation to Kierkegaard’s rendering of *imago Dei*. Stokes’ understanding of the human self as image is that it may reflect either God or the world. To not be mere a reflection of the world, one has to be a spirit, which itself is invisible, and therefore is a reflection of God. But to be this reflection, which is to be able to reflect God—not to distort God, or to mix that reflection of God with something else—one has to become nothing. *Summa summarum*, a human being is a particular kind of image, an image of God, while being a spirit, but to reflect God one has to become “a surface for reflection.”²⁵¹

Another type of specific image is a mirror image. Although, as the author notices, Kierkegaard uses the mirror metaphor for more than one reason, particularly one of them seems to stand out, “the *immediate* self-recognition involved in seeing oneself in a mirror.”²⁵² This recognition, as Stokes continues, “is not a comparative phenomenon, where we note similarities between what we perceive and some pre-existing template.”²⁵³ Kierkegaard’s usage of the Scripture as mirror (the mirror of the Word) even deepens that understanding as the Scripture tells us what one has to do and where one stands, unless one instead of looking into the mirror, looks at it. Here the mirror simultaneously shows what to do and evaluates us, but it also calls us to acknowledge the fact that it addresses us. Moreover, the mirror in which one can see their condition is also the other who, as a moral exemplar, together with the mirror of the Word compels the onlooker “to turn immediately to action rather than contemplation.”²⁵⁴

As one can see, scholars have attempted to explain imitation in Kierkegaard from various perspectives. Some focus on Kierkegaard’s texts, others go beyond his oeuvre and refer to a group of texts, which if not directly influential upon the Dane, were well known to him or belonged to his private library. Lastly, some approaches to the phenomenon in question avail themselves with readings offered by contemporary thinkers. One can detect a certain development in the understanding of Kierkegaard’s

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.106. “To be human is to be made in the image of God, but this likeness consists in the ability to emulate God, which, paradoxically, involves becoming as nothing.”

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

imitation among enumerated thinkers, which is for example turning from the phenomenon of the imitation of Christ to the one of imitation *per se* in Kierkegaard or the development from reading Kierkegaard's imitation in the context of religious *imitatio Christi* to *mimesis*. Moreover, what most of these thinkers have in common is a conceptual reading of imitation. So rendered imitation is understood not in the context of its mother concept, *mimesis*, but rather as following after, which has its roots not in the Greek *mimesis* but in the biblical *imitatio Christi*. In short, to imitate means for most of these scholars, whether religiously or ethically understood, to follow after.

In the next chapter, I will venture beyond the confines of this one. I will explore Kierkegaard's imitation from the perspective of its mother concept, *mimesis*. As I will show, such an approach reveals new dimensions of the notion in question, explains certain difficulties noted above in the appraisals of the subject, but also shows some other difficulties embedded in Kierkegaard's imitation. This is to say, that the findings from Chapter One will not be ostensibly dismissed or ignored, but will constitute the fundamental point of departure for the next and the following parts of this study.

II. CHAPTER TWO: MIMETIC MODELS AND THE *SOCRATIC* IMITATION

In the previous chapter, I showed that in their analysis of Kierkegaard's imitation scholars tend to focus more on the phenomenon of the imitation of Christ than on imitation as such. They are also more inclined to determine the meaning of the concept by taking on board its etymology in the Danish language as "following after" and its association with the Christian tradition of *imitatio Christi* than by inspecting imitation's association with the Greek *mimesis*.

The main goals of this chapter are to demonstrate the mimetic structure that underlies Kierkegaard's imitation, which I find in the phenomenon of acting in relation to a model, and to argue for the Socratic dimension of Kierkegaard's imitation. This means that here I challenge two prevailing scholarly claims on the topic of my examination. First, I contend that Kierkegaard engages in his writings more than one privileged mimetic model, contrary to the dominant reading of the problem as putting forward Christ as the only model for imitation. Second, I claim that Kierkegaard's conceptualization of imitation as "following after" has a double origin, informed by the biblical and non-biblical traditions; this stands in disagreement with an appraisal of Kierkegaardian imitation as being strictly of Christian provenience, an appraisal that greatly ignores *mimesis*.

Moreover, it is commonly argued that Kierkegaard's imitation should be read from religious or ethical perspectives, and therefore considering it from the angle of *mimesis* and aesthetics displays, at the very least, a grave misunderstanding of the notion in question. In opposition to this claim, I will show that these domains, namely the ethical-religious and aesthetic, cannot be ultimately separated and must be read with a certain mutual-referentiality in the context of Kierkegaard's imitation. By elaborating the mimetic structure of "a model" I will show how the notions of the imitation of Christ and Kierkegaard's imitation (understood as "following after," among other things) correspond with the mimetic concepts of *figura*, *exemplum* and *imitatio*. Subsequently, availing myself of the appraisals of a mimetic model in the works of Erich Auerbach, Plato, Immanuel Kant, and René Girard, I will identify the dominant mimetic models in Kierkegaard's thought. I will show that Kierkegaard considers both persons and textual and aesthetic renderings of the ideal self to be

mimetic models. Lastly, Girard's account of mimetic desire, Socratic imitation and Plato's "non-imitative imitation" will serve as fundamental points of departure for a comprehensive account of Kierkegaard's imitation offered in the last chapter of my dissertation.

1. *Imitatio Christi, exemplum, figura and the mimetic model.*

Imitatio Christi was a complex phenomenon that offered an alternative to the legalistic religious discourse and scholastic theology of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, it was itself in many ways both a part and a product of that period. It was, among other things, an expression of the period's participation in the ongoing conversation about *mimesis*. Although *imitatio Christi* expressed itself in different religious scholarships and practices, it was in fact a part of a phenomenon that from the perspective of *mimesis* could be understood—without confines to the religious domain—as “creation in reference to a model.”²⁵⁵ Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf in their *magnum opus*, *Mimesis: Culture- Art- Society*, succinctly explain the mimetic dimension of *imitatio Christi* in the period from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance:

God, as the supreme object of imitation, was the source of the creative. The creativity of imitation was understood less in the sense of producing a product than as an intellectual endeavor expressed in deeds, in particular, in the *imitatio Christi*. It proceeded according to models of mimetic action supposedly established as immutable form and for all time. During that period *mimesis* was characterized essentially by three qualities: it is reproduction in accordance with an idea; it constitutes a relation of succession in reference to a model; and it produces a similarity to the model and—a thought that emerges in the Renaissance—has the nature of the probable.²⁵⁶

As I will show in the following part of this chapter, we can read Kierkegaard's imitation as strongly drawing upon these three qualities. Such a reading will contribute to the overall comprehension of Kierkegaard's imitation without relying on its religious-ethical breadth—which reliance often serves to reduce imitation to the

²⁵⁵ Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 61.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

status of a conveyer of other ideas or to a supportive idea—and will offer an understanding of what constitutes Kierkegaard’s imitation *per se*. In short, to understand what Kierkegaard’s imitation *is*, not what it is *for*, I take imitation in its nature, or its very structure, so to speak, as its main object of investigation. This means that I here focus mainly on the formal, not the phenomenal aspects of imitation, though not dismissing them. To do so, I need to “dissect” imitation, or break it apart, in order not to make use of other terms that, as was shown in the previous chapter, often defer the meaning, instead of actually revealing it. Therefore, by referring to the above-quoted passage, Kierkegaard’s imitation in its basic sense is an undertaking in reference to a model. Yet, this definition needs further clarification, first, of the status of “the reproduced” and its “relation of succession in reference to a model” and the problem of “a similarity to the model.” Second, what needs to be known is “what” the model is. An understanding of the two will in turn help in comprehending the sort of undertaking imitation is. In this chapter, however, I am predominantly focusing on the model for imitation, leaving the general analysis of imitation in Kierkegaard for Chapter Five. Lastly, my rendering of the mimetic models in Kierkegaard to a considerable extent adheres to Walsh’s already discussed appraisal of Kierkegaard’s prototype as “associated with being an archetype or original pattern, mode, form, or ideal of some kind”²⁵⁷ and having both Christian and philosophical dimensions. In that sense it prescribes the ideal of religious and moral life.

The roots of Kierkegaard’s concept of a mimetic model stretch as far as into the Greco-Roman concepts of *figura* and *exemplum*. The classic appraisal of *figura* we find in Erich Auerbach’s essay with the eponymous title “*Figura*.” For the present study I take from this complex essay two notions. First, this text provides us with several understandings of *figura* that correspond with Kierkegaard’s mimetic model, such as form, shape, structure, schema, example. Second, *figura* was used as the translation of the Greek *typos*,²⁵⁸ of which sense is retained in Kierkegaard’s “prototype” or “pattern” and “image.” Auerbach’s account of *figura* states that “[i]t was not only the plastic sense of *typos*, but also its inclination toward the universal, lawful, and exemplary...that exerted an influence on *figura*.”²⁵⁹ This means that as such *figura* denotes something material and visual (“*statua* and even of *imago*,

²⁵⁷ Walsh, *Thinking Christianly in an Existential Mode*, p. 139.

²⁵⁸ Auerbach, “*Figura*,” pp. 11-5.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

effigies, species simulacrum”²⁶⁰), but also formal and structural. Referring to the well known to Kierkegaard Roman thinker and poet Lucretius, Auerbach points out that *figura* was used to elaborate the relation between model and copy (*forma* and *imago*), which he illustrates by the relation between children and their parents. It is said that children resemble their parents (and also grandparents) in the sense they are “of both *figurae*,” as they bare resemblance (physical, mental, of characters, inclinations, etc.) to both parents.²⁶¹ In that sense, so crucial to the correct understanding of Kierkegaard’s mimetic model, “a copy” is not inferior to the “original,” and children are complete and fully valuable beings. There is no intention to pass children off as their parents, which would denote another usage of *figura*, where the term indicates mistaking appearance or perception for reality.

The Church Fathers used *figura* to denote the “prefigurative” sense of the Old Testament in relation to the New Testament, where “the persons and events of the Old Testament were *prefigurations* of the New Testament and its history of salvation.”²⁶² In that sense Joshua is treated by Tertulian as a Christ-type, as “a phenomenal prophecy or prefiguration of the future Saviour.”²⁶³ The meanings that come with the terms *figura* and *prefiguration* are in fact renderings of the Greek *typos*, and as such are related to *imago*, in the sense of the Biblical *ad imaginem Dei*.²⁶⁴ Here *figura* is “the creative, formative principle, change amid the enduring essence, the shades of meaning between copy and archetype.”²⁶⁵ Therefore apart from *merely* being a mimetic model, *figura* already embodies and determines its modes of interpretation, appropriation and representation, in short its logic. It also qualifies the relation between itself and its relative referent.

Exemplum is another mimetic concept that helps in conceptualizing and understanding Kierkegaard’s mimetic model. It does so by elaborating on the relationship between the original and its re-presentation and draws connections between the phenomena of imitation of God(s), virtuous characters and their symbolic (non-human) representations. The term underpins the Pauline understanding of human nature, expressed in the notion of man as the image of God, according to Geurt Hendrik van Kooten. In his *Paul’s Anthropology in Context: The Image of God*,

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 29. In a similar manner, “Moses is *figura Christi*” for Augustine, see *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-8.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Assimilation to God, and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity, van Kooten traces the transition of non-Christian renderings of the human being as an image of God to their Christian forms.²⁶⁶ Van Kooten points to a fundamental understanding of the image of God in “the wise and the virtuous” in Greco-Roman paganism. In that context a human as an image of God is understood in relation to his capacity to be moral, knowledgeable and virtuous. Van Kooten quotes Cicero, who says, “virtue exists in man and God alike,”²⁶⁷ and Cleanthes in *Hymn to Zeus*, who declares that “we have origin in you bearing a likeness to God,” a theme that, according to J.C. Thom, may have influenced Marcus Manilius’ understanding of man as *exemplum dei*. *Exemplum* here is the Latin translation of the Greek *mimema*, a rendering often used synonymously with the Greek *eikon*, rendered into the Latin *imago*.²⁶⁸ This notion of man, central to the Stoics, as *exemplum dei* undergoes a transformation from Seneca’s concept of perfection of human reason in accordance with God’s intelligence to a more Platonic command to understand and resemble God (*kata dynamin*) presented in the account of Epictetus: “That there is a God...we must learn what the gods are like...the man who is going to please and obey them must endeavour *as best as he can to become assimilated to them (kata dynamin)*.... In everything he says and does, he must act as an emulator, a zealous admirer and follower of God.”²⁶⁹

Without a doubt, this resonates with the person of the apostle Paul (greatly influenced by the Stoics) and the ideas he introduced in his letters,²⁷⁰ but it also bears some resemblance with Kierkegaard’s thought. *Exempla* are also an important part of Roman education. To a large extent Pauline letters resemble the literary genre of *exempla*, which teaches morality and virtues of moderation. An instance of such teachings can be found in the famous compilation by Valerius Maximus, *Memorable*

²⁶⁶ Geurt Hendrik van Kooten, *Paul’s Anthropology in Context: The Image of God, Assimilation to God, and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008, pp. 92-219.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5. For a detailed account of the etymology and various understandings of *exemplum* see: John D. Lyons, *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 2014 pp. 8-33.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 160. On a detailed account of the transition from the Platonic rendering of the goal of philosophy and the philosopher as “becoming like God insofar as is possible” to the Stoics see Daniel C. Russell’s “Virtue as ‘Likeness to God’ in Plato and Seneca,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2004, pp. 241-60.

²⁷⁰ 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Tess. 1:6. See also the abundance of different contextualized *protrepsis* and *paraenesis* of Paul and Peter. See also Christ’s demand for following him as an example: John 13:15.

Deeds and Sayings.

There are other types of *exempla* that do not represent, emulate or imitate God, gods, or people, but rather they become *exempla* by virtue of their actions, often tragic or heroic. This means that in contrast to the *exempla* whose deeds are qualified by a theological quest of “becoming like God insofar as is possible,” they become another type of *exempla* through undertaking actions or behaving in a particular way that we find paradigmatic. In that sense Niobe is one such *exemplum*. Without going into details, we know from Homer’s account that due to her distress and loss she “becomes the paradigm of inconsolability.”²⁷¹ She turns into stone and her paradigmatic applicability is secured by her transition from the realm of the human—reflection—to the realm of nature—immediacy. She is what she is by what she is evermore: a weeping stone that is an image of everlasting sorrow. Her example is often given as an instruction for consolation, temperance and self-control. Some *exempla* we find in nature. For instance, we attribute to some animals meticulous and laborious work. If someone is indolent and loafing, we often bid them to consider the example of ants and bees for educational and virtue enhancing reasons. On a different note, nature as such provides us with exemplary instances of form, patterns and ratios. The power of *exempla* reappears in the Middle Ages, faces some criticism in the late Renaissance and is challenged with the emergence of the Enlightenment.²⁷² As I will demonstrate in the following part of this chapter, Kierkegaard’s engagement of mimetic models to a large extent adheres to the Greco-Roman, medieval and modern understandings of *exemplum*.

2. Plato’s and Kant’s ideal philosopher and Girard’s imitative models.

Although *mimesis* of the Middle Ages is different from the one forged by the classics, it was itself a reference to “models and techniques taken over from classical culture and the Christianity of late antiquity.”²⁷³ Plato’s ideals played the prominent role of a model in antiquity and consequently were naturally taken up as models for the Middle Ages. However contentious is the academic discussion over Plato’s take

²⁷¹ Michèle Lowrie, *Horace’s Narrative Odes*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1997, p. 48.

²⁷² See an account of that in Larry Scanlon’s “Redefining the exemplum: narrative, ideology and subjectivity,” in his *Narrative, Authority and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, pp. 27-36. See also Potolsky, *Mimesis*, pp. 59-70

²⁷³ Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 61.

on imitation (a subject that I will discuss at length in the penultimate section of this chapter), it seems that his “suspicion” pertains predominantly to a distinction between “bad” and “good” imitative models, not imitation *per se*. On the one hand, Zeus was a poor imitative model, though a god, because he could not restrain his sexual desires, unlike Socrates, who, perpetually questioning his pretenses to knowledge, Plato puts forward as a genuine imitative model. On the other hand, the artist (the maker of images) who does not know what he imitates accounts for improper imitation; the philosopher/guardian first existentially redoubles within herself the ideals she ventures, before applying them to society. In short, both Zeus and Socrates are considered imitative models by their moral acts; both the philosopher/guardian/teacher and the artist are also considered imitative models, which are judged based on their accounts/practices of imitation. As I will discuss in the following part of this chapter, these imitative models entail followers. Fundamental here are two factors: whether the ideals to be imitated are immutable, and whether they can be existentially appropriated.

Kant’s brief attempt to account for the ideal of the philosopher can be found in his *conceptus cosmicus* from the Architectonics section of *Critique of Pure Reason*. By opposing scholastic philosophy, which itself serves different “optionally chosen ends,”²⁷⁴ to “his” understanding of philosophy as that which “deals with the whole vocation of man,”²⁷⁵ Kant conceptualizes “the ideal *philosopher*.”²⁷⁶ The ideal philosopher is the one who is “the lawgiver of the human reason,”²⁷⁷ which means for Kant that she can and should use the sciences understood in the scholastic and pre-modern way (natural sciences and logico-mathematical disciplines) not as ends in themselves, but as means to simultaneously advance and limit reason in the critical sense. This cannot be attained without the participation of reason itself. Kant says the philosopher is a kind of teacher “who sets them [the mathematician, the natural philosopher, and the logician] their tasks, and employs them as instruments, to further

²⁷⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. by Norman Kemp Smith, London: Macmillan 1929, p. 658 (A840, B868). See also *Ibid.*, p. 657 (A838, B866) “[T]he concept of philosophy [as] a concept of a system of knowledge which is sought solely in its character as a science, and which has there-fore in view only the systematic unity appropriate to science, and consequently no more than the logical perfection of knowledge.”

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 658 (A840, B868).

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 657 (A838, B866). “But there is likewise another concept of philosophy, a *conceptus cosmicus*, which has always formed the real basis of the term ‘philosophy,’ especially when it has been as it were personified and its archetype represented in the ideal *philosopher*.”

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 658 (A839, B867).

the essential ends of human reason.”²⁷⁸ The essential ends, comprehended as ultimate ends, constitute moral philosophy for Kant. The philosopher is “the *moralist*,” and his job is to “exhibit self-control under the guidance of reason.”²⁷⁹ This clearly resembles Plato’s understanding of the true philosopher with respect to the practical and existential dimension of first acting morally and second acting in one’s own life.

Kant and Plato differ with regards to their respective understandings of the “existence” of the notion of the ideal/true philosopher. For Plato the ideal is immutable and transcendent,²⁸⁰ for Kant it is transcendental. “The philosopher,” says Kant, is “[conceived] in the ideal...as he nowhere exists, while the idea of his legislation is to be found in that reason with which every human being is endowed.”²⁸¹ The ideals of pure reason are to be existentially and practically appropriated (exercised), but they are not to be apprehended or found beyond the faculty of human reason that constitutes them, i.e., the idea of the genuine philosopher is something we all have the capacity to understand and acquire. Although Kant seems to be concerned with bringing the ideal philosopher “closer,” which means from the transcendent world to the world of reason, it appears that, at least in the Kierkegaardian sense, he achieves precisely the opposite, an abstract concept. What is lost is a tangible example of the ideal presupposed by Plato (Odysseus,²⁸² Socrates); what is addressed is the problem of the possible *regressus ad infinitum* so characteristic of the world of ideas (is there an idea of the idea?²⁸³), supposedly resolved in the transcendental function of Kant’s reason.

Does Kant’s position hold? Should we consider only ideals conceived by reason as imitative models? By appealing to the thought of René Girard, I will show that a less naïve meditation on human nature reveals its deeply mimetic propensities, where objects of imitation in a natural sense are other people, rather than ideals. As I

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 658 (A840, B868).

²⁸⁰ Obviously it is debatable whether Plato’s *eidos* exists in the transcendent world especially in the Kierkegaardian sense of the word, however just for the sake of comparison I used the term to indicate the ideal transcendent to our world or existing in the (transcendent) realm of forms.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 658 (A840, B868).

²⁸² See below Girard’s straightforward reading of that in his analysis of Cervantes’ account of the practice of imitation and the figure of imitative model, from which he derives his own concept of “triangular desire”: See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, transl. by Yvonne Freccero, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press 1976, p. 1 “[T]he man who wishes to be known as careful and patient should and does imitate Ulysses [Greek Odysseus], in whose person and works Homer paints for us a vivid portrait of carefulness and patience.”

²⁸³ This problem (considered in the realm of aesthetics) will be explored in the next chapter as *mimesis* of *mimesis*.

will show in the following part of this chapter, both objects of imitation—ideals and persons—are at stake for Kierkegaard, though considered in a mutual relation.

Another important rendering of the notion of a mimetic model can be found in the works of Girard.²⁸⁴ In his analysis of Don Quixote of Cervantes, the French thinker notices a peculiar relationship between the knight errant and the figure of Amadis of Gaul, which entails the idea that if Don Quixote wants to be chivalrous he has to imitate Amadis of Gaul. What makes Amadis of Gaul such a unique figure whom Don Quixote calls “the only, the first, the unique, the master and lord of all those who existed in the world?”²⁸⁵ The answer lies in the fact that for Don Quixote, Amadis of Gaul embodies what the knight errant would like to become, therefore Amadis of Gaul represents the model of chivalry for Don Quixote. By choosing Amadis of Gaul as his imitative model, Don Quixote simultaneously subordinates himself to the knight. But this has more than one dimension. On the one hand the knight errant chooses what he knows, or what he thinks he knows, while on the other hand, Don Quixote “chooses” that which he does not know, which is the desire of his imitative model. This discovery, which forms the foundation of Girard’s theory of mimetic desire, means that while imitating our imitative model we always imitate more than we think we do, that is, objects of their desire.

This form of mimeticism Girard calls acquisitive desire, which in its original French—*mimèsis d’appropriation*—closely resemble a fundamental category of Kierkegaard’s imitation, namely (undiscussed in this research) appropriation. So, by

²⁸⁴ The mimetic theory of Girard is a highly complex phenomenon that defies short exposition. In the first chapter of this research I referred to the reading of Girard’s scapegoat mechanism showing that, one can “explain” the phenomenon of Socrates’ trial and execution and Kierkegaard’s reading of Jesus’ trial and execution, and Kierkegaard’s concept of the martyr, applying the perspective of Girard’s mimetic theory. In this chapter I will turn to another aspect of Girard’s mimetic theory. Exploring his concept of the triangular desire, I will investigate the possible usages of Girard’s concept of imitative model he calls “mediator of desire.” Apart from what has been noted, it is important to say that the “intellectual” relationship between Kierkegaard and Girard, although has its limitations, is very strong and meaningful. My reading of that issue, in a way, goes against the thesis put forward by Diego Giordano in his informative article “René Girard: From Mimetic Desire to Anonymous Masses,” *Kierkegaard’s Influence on the Social Sciences, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 13, ed. by Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2011, pp. 137-48. For Giordano, the distinction between the thinkers apropos *mimesis* is to be found in the fact that “for Kierkegaard, imitation is limited to the following after Christ (*sequela Christi*), while the notion of the prototype refers to martyrdom. Moreover, Kierkegaard identifies the martyr as a prototype not merely for the sake of imitation but first and foremost as an ideal, the value of which is in the great effort it demands from the single individual” (*Ibid.*, p. 146). Giordano’s thesis is indeed what this research tries to challenge showing a deeply mimetic dimension of Kierkegaard’s production by, among other things, putting into relations categories of the martyr, the ideal (self), prototype, and imitation.

²⁸⁵ René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, transl. by Yvonne Freccero, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press 1976, p. 1.

imitating the desire of the imitative model, “the mediator of desire”²⁸⁶ in Girard’s taxonomy, their desires become ours. Girard explains this mimetic process by referring to the relation between the knights: “Don Quixote has surrendered to Amadis the individual’s fundamental prerogative: he no longer chooses the objects of his own desire—Amadis must choose for him. The disciple pursues objects which are determined for him...by the model of all chivalry.”²⁸⁷ Girard understands *mimesis* as the most fundamental feature of human nature; mimeticism is therefore not something that people have power over, but rather something that shapes, creates and “constrains people to orient themselves according to models.”²⁸⁸

The ultimate goal of the mimetic process is existence, according to Girard. For instance, Don Quixote, being “a typical example of the victim of triangular desire,”²⁸⁹ wishes for “chivalric existence” and therefore imitates Amadis of Gaul. He could wish for something different, such as artistic existence, and his imitative object would be different as well. “Chivalric existence” is more than a lifestyle for Don Quixote. In his imitative relationship with Amadis of Gaul, Don Quixote attempts something fundamental to human nature, one’s being, the knowledge of which the imitative model seems to possess.²⁹⁰ Subsequently, the model of triangular desire furnishes the subject with its own desires and therefore the subject desires precisely what its model desires—the subject imitates what model imitates.²⁹¹ Amadis of Gaul, on the one hand, “inserts” his desires into the heart of Don Quixote, but on the other hand, the model of all chivalry is the way for Don Quixote to become chivalric. And this is what Don Quixote thinks he wants.

The importance of the model to the subject consists not only in conveying or transferring to the subject a desire that gives sense and meaning to their life (the model’s desires that the subject consciously or unconsciously accepts as its own), but

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, “We shall call this model the *mediator* of desire.”

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 256. “Girard conceives the mimetic structure of consciousness as a blind mechanism that, given the irreducibly mimetic nature of human action, constrains people to orient themselves according to models.”

²⁸⁹ Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, p. 3.

²⁹⁰ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, transl. by Patrick Gregory, London and New York: Bloomsbury 2013, pp. 164. “[The subject] desires being, something he himself lacks and which some other person seems to possess. The subject thus looks at that other person to inform him of what he should desire in order to acquire that being. If the model, who is apparently already endowed with superior being, desires some object, the object must surely be capable of conferring even greater plenitude of being. It is not through words, therefore, but by the example of his own desire, that the model conveys to the subject the supreme desirability of the object....We must understand that desire itself is essentially mimetic, directed toward an object desired by the model.”

²⁹¹ Girard does not eventually explain what “that thing” is.

also in allowing the subject to be successful in attaining what it wants (openness of the imitative model to imitation and tangible results of the imitative process). As I will outline briefly in Chapter Three, this imitative process does not clearly distinguish between an imitator and an imitative model in the sphere of human interactions and does not merely define relations between individuals. On the contrary, according to Girard, what the mimetic reading reveals, on the one hand, is a deeply collective dimension of human existence and, on the other hand, what he calls “*interdividual*” human being, a formation “whereby individuals mutually constitute one another.”²⁹²

An example of this collective *mimesis* one finds in the life of Don Quixote’s squire, Sancho Panza. His dreams of governing and owning an island do not originate in the squire’s mind “spontaneously.” They are rather “seeded into” Sancho Panza’s consciousness by the knight errant.²⁹³ At face value, the squire does not have his master as the imitative model; still Don Quixote is able to imprint on him ridiculous ideas that resemble those of his own in their nature, though they differ in content. The imitative relation between the two would testify to a proliferation of conscious and unconscious mimetic relationships between individuals and collective entities, occurring sometimes without clearly defined imitative models. This would entail an idea which I will explore more in Chapter Five, where, on the one hand we are “already determined” to live mimetic lives, while on the other hand, to a certain point we are able to choose the life we envisage.

Girard’s theory of mimetic desire pertains not only to the dimension of human relationships but also has a transcendental and religious breadth. The French thinker notes: “Chivalric existence is the imitation of Amadis in the sense that the Christian’s existence is the imitation of Christ,”²⁹⁴ a thought with which Kierkegaard can agree only half way, because, as I will elaborate in further part of this chapter, Christ is not a Christian. Imitating Amadis of Gaul, Don Quixote will become sufficiently chivalric

²⁹² Scott Cowdell, *Abiding Faith: Christianity Beyond Certainty, Anxiety, and Violence*, Cambridge: James Clark 2010, p. 78. See also Douglas Hedley, *Sacrifice Imagined: Violence, Atonement, and the Sacred*, New York and London: Continuum 2011, p. 176.

²⁹³ Interestingly, in that context Girard does not clearly explain the mimetic structure of the process of implementation of Don Quixote’s ideas into the mind of Sancho Panza. The question is how the squire gets these ideas not having the knight errant as his imitative model. Putting it differently, we only know Don Quixote’s imitative model, Amadis of Gaul, not of Sancho Panza. Still Don Quixote is able to implement imitative ideas into the mind of his squire, although Sancho Panza does not desire what his master desires, “chivalric existence.”

²⁹⁴ Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, p. 2.

to be considered the true knight errant for Girard; likewise, by imitating Christ one becomes the true Christian. The key here is not the nature of either of the imitative models, divine or chivalric/human, but the mimetic structure of which the imitative model is a part. It comprises three parts: the subject, the model/mediator of desire, and the object. The triangular relationship is susceptible to remodeling if we modify one or all of these parts, and yet the triangular nature of their interrelationship sustains any such modification.²⁹⁵

Applying Girard's taxonomy to the imitative model identified in Chapter One, Christ, one could identify Christ's followers as imitative subjects. As we will see, the same case pertains to Socrates. Both Socrates and Christ represent imitative models or mediators of desire. The former is a model of the genuine human, which is an amalgamation of two tasks: living the examined life and serving the gods to the point of one's death. This is to say that Socrates desires the examined life and serving the gods. What follows, by appropriating the desires of Socrates, on the one hand, one adopts as one's goals the search for truth, beauty and good, and listening to one's "internal voice" and serving the gods. On the other hand, one relinquishes pretenses to objective truth about oneself and the world. A similar case appears to be at work in the imitation of Christ. It means desiring what He desires, which is perfect obedience to God while existing before God.

Although it entails several shortcomings, when rendered in this way imitation seems to deal successfully with some of the problems that arise from the understanding of Kierkegaard's imitation as *imitatio Christi* presented in the previous chapter. To name just two of these problems, Girard's mimetic theory offers a resolution of the problem of Christ *qua* Pattern and Redeemer and the problem of suffering. In imitating Christ we imitate his (conscious) desire to serve His Father, not his salvific work, which as such was subordinated to Christ's desire to be obedient to the One who sent him.²⁹⁶ Analogically, Christian suffering is not a necessary element of following Christ, but it may result from being obedient to God, likewise Don Quixote's titling at windmills is only a component of his realization of the ideal of chivalric existence.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.* "The object changes with each adventure but the triangle remains. The barber's basin or Master Peter's puppets replace the windmills; but Amadis is always present."

²⁹⁶ The problem with this claim is that no clear distinction between desire and intention is provided here. What I will elaborate in Chapter Five, the main distinction between the two is in the element of intention and specifically defined 'non-imitativeness' of an imitated action or object.

However, the problem that Girard's mimetic desire poses is the fact that he sees *mimesis* mainly as an unconscious and unacknowledged force directing human lives. Despite various debates of a Christological nature, this is especially problematic in reading the imitation of Christ for two reasons. First, reading the life of Christ and his salvific work as desire-driven, unconscious and, in effect, to a large degree unintentional seems contradictory with Kierkegaard's reading of the story of Jesus. Second, it simply appears inconsistent with the biblical text, which presents the life of Jesus as driven by his unyielding and conscious obedience to the one who sent him. Additionally, as I will show further in this chapter, Girard's mimetic theory disagrees with Plato's account of the life of Socrates and his affirmation of genuine imitation understood as "non-imitative" and conscious.²⁹⁷

Yet, Girard's theory of mimetic desire serves as a fundamental point of departure for my rendering of Kierkegaard's imitation understood as indirect, and it will reappear in Chapter Five coupled with imitation rendered as "non-imitative" and intention driven.²⁹⁸ Moreover, my understanding of Kierkegaard's external prototypes I identify in the figures of Job and Socrates is by and large influenced by Girard's theory of victimary mechanism, which I would like to briefly elucidate before delving into my account of Kierkegaard's internal and external mimetic models. Lastly, as Girard shows and, what Kierkegaard greatly endorses, despite our efforts to imitate consciously or live non-imitative lives, which is the romantic ideal of autonomous identity, unacknowledged mimeticism is a fundamental part of our nature over which we have no definite power.

For Girard, mediated desire eventually leads to conflicts of the "supply and demand" type, which eventually result in rivalries. On the other hand, if desire is mediated, people sharing the same desires become similar to each other to the point of becoming what Girard calls "doubles." Chris Fleming succinctly describes this

²⁹⁷ The case of desire and desiring already appears in Plato's symposium where desiring the good means desiring the object of the desire of the good. In that sense desiring the good that desires itself is good. There is a link between desire, good, love and beauty in the dialogue, where loving or desiring a particular beauty in an actual person means desiring what the beauty of the person signifies or desires, which is the beauty as an ideal. Of importance is the fact that desire can be conscious and unconscious for Plato, and even the unconscious desire of the beauty in a beautiful person is not something that as such is bad, what seems to disagree with Girard.

²⁹⁸ See for example a comparison of an imitation of means and intentions (goals) in copying human behavior in Michael Tomasello and Malinda Carpenter, "Intention Reading and Imitative Learning," in *Perspectives on Imitation: From Neuroscience to Social Science: Imitation, Human Development, and Culture*, vol. 2, ed. Susan Hurley and Nick Chater, Cambridge: MIT Press 2005, pp. 133-48. See also a comparison of direct and indirect imitation in section "Indirect Imitation" in Chapter Five of this thesis.

machinery as follows: “conflictual desire moves in the direction of the effacement of differences between people: as rivalry intensifies, characteristics that previously distinguished individuals begin to erode and antagonists effectively become ‘doubles’ of each other.”²⁹⁹ Rivalry results in crisis and violence, which can only be resolved in scapegoating sacrifice. The surrogate victim is someone different, unwanted, unwelcomed, the other or the minority; their execution is justified by the need to sustain harmony in society.³⁰⁰

Among many scapegoats throughout the history of humanity we have Socrates, who is executed by his fellow Athenians. Scholars had commonly perceived the death of Socrates as an execution of an innocent victim until the writings of Hegel began to challenge that interpretation. Following Hegel, Kierkegaard argues that Socrates is a victim who is guilty of having challenged the state, which at that time was in a crisis itself. Killing Socrates is in fact “a momentum” that allows Athenian society to consolidate itself in the face of a social, political and religious crisis. Through his own death, Socrates, who represents what is utterly different for all of the major parties in Athens, diminishes polarities and temporarily obliterates the differences between these groups. He is therefore not an innocent victim killed by the whimsical and degenerated state. The death of Socrates is a form of satisfaction to the conservative agency of the senate and a progressive opposition (represented by the Sophists). These antagonistic groups obtain reconciliation in the sacrificial mechanism of the scapegoat. Socrates is a witness to the truth for Kierkegaard, but he is also a martyr. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Kierkegaard becomes a martyr in the Socratic way by imitating the wise man of Athens.

Finally, as Wm. Blake Tyrrell shows in his reading of the death of Socrates in *The Sacrifice of Socrates: Athens, Plato, Girard*,³⁰¹ from a Girardian point of view Socrates is a “conscious victim.” In other words, Socrates is aware of the scapegoating mechanism, at least to a certain extent. The death of Jesus represents a qualitative advancement upon the understanding of the victimary mechanism because,

²⁹⁹ Chris Fleming, “*Mimesis*, Violence and the Sacred: An Overview of the Thought of Rene Girard,” *Violence, Desire, and the Sacred*, vol. 2 ed. by Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming and Joel Hodge, New York London: Bloomsbury 2014, p. 3.

³⁰⁰ René Girard, *Scapegoat*, transl. By Yvonne Freccero, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1989, p. 15. “Ultimately, the persecutors always convince themselves that a small number of people, or even a single individual, despite his relative weakness, is extremely harmful to the whole of the society.”

³⁰¹ Wm. Blake Tyrrell, *The Sacrifice of Socrates. Athens, Plato, Girard*, East Lansing: Michigan State University 2012, pp. 5-9; pp. 138-45.

according to Girard, He is fully conscious of the mechanism to which He is subjected. However, for both Kierkegaard and Girard, Christ's death does not fit with the image of a martyr, because He is not merely a martyr. For the former, Christ is much more than a martyr, while for the latter Christ reveals the scapegoating mechanism in the attitude and actions that led to his death. As we will see in the following part of this chapter, Kierkegaard takes the martyr, not Christ, as a model of a genuine Christian.

3. Plurality of mimetic models

So far I have shown that the key aspect of “the broadly understood” culture of the Middle Ages, with its pietistic variety expressed in *imitatio Christi*, was action conducted in reference to a model. I presented the Platonic rendering of an imitative model in the form of the philosopher-guardian-artist who undertakes representation of these ideals in their own life and in the lives of others. This model corresponds with the Kantian ideal of a philosopher who both willingly limits his reason according to the requirements of transcendently understood sciences and sets it to establish the realm of human action and responsibility. By referring to the philosophy of Girard, I brought forward another distinct interpretation of the imitative model, showing that it links the subject and the object of imitation in the triangular relation which, contrary to Plato's and Kant's appraisal of the phenomenon in question, is characterized by unconscious mimetic desire, not by reason.

First, considering the above-discussed different appraisals of a mimetic model I will now identify and analyze different forms the mimetic model takes in Kierkegaard's writings. Second, reading Kierkegaard's thought from a mimetic perspective—without reference to the philosophical content of his thought—I will show that the thinker engages in his writings a plural number of mimetic models. Afterwards, I will briefly give an account of some of them, examining their role in Kierkegaard's existential project. Lastly, I especially use the term “mimetic model” in this context to show that Kierkegaard's reference to a model entails imitation, but also representation, enactment or emulation. This means that a mimetic model often requires its subject to interpret it, change it and surpass it, which demands going beyond the type of imitation that seeks similitude and proximity.

At first, looking at the very structure of Kierkegaard's imitation we discern a fundamental relationship between an imitator and that which is being imitated (the object of imitation), which the Dane calls the prototype. We find that imitation is a form of movement, which he understands dialectically. On the one hand, it is the imitator's pursuit to conform one's life to the prototype,³⁰² the movement from the imitator towards the realm of the ideal—the prototype. On the other hand, it is “Mak[ing] an attempt to place ‘the prototype’ into actuality,”³⁰³ which is the movement from the ideal to the actual. Accordingly, *mimesis* understood as imitation is a double movement that “engages” two spheres: the sphere of the subject and the sphere of the prototype. The imitative action is in its structure analogous to a vector quantity structure. Drawing on that analogy, one can say that imitation is a relation that comprises two opposite directions: a movement directed toward the realm of the prototype, a movement up, and a movement that is directed at bringing the realm of the prototype to actuality, a movement down.

Imitation so described resembles Plato's rendering of that concept presented in the *Republic* I hinted upon in the previous section of this chapter. An imitator is like the guardian who initially engages ideals in her own life, before implementing them into the realm of the *polis*. Although, as one can rightfully argue, “the actuality” Kierkegaard has in mind is the actuality of a concrete human being, not of the *polis*; as was argued before in the works of Dewey, Ferreira and Barnett, Kierkegaard's imitation has an ethical and social dimension—one cannot go without the other. Therefore, what we can see from this juxtaposition is that Kierkegaard's imitation refers to the two pairs of movements and figures. The latter is the imitator-pattern duo, the former is in fact a double-movement, up-down.

Having noted that, it seems that the natural thing to embark upon in our exposition of Kierkegaard's imitation would be to explore the exclusivity of the relation between an imitator (a would-be Christian) and the pattern for imitation (Christ). In fact, most of the readings of imitation from Chapter One proceeded along that way, offering first a picture of Kierkegaard's Christology and anthropology, and consequently, explaining the concept in question through the distinctiveness of the relation between Christ and His follower. Such an undertaking would in fact be the

³⁰² Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 327, entry 1867 (SKS 23, 404; NB20:23). “As soon as there is a prototype, there is the obligation to imitation. What does imitation mean? It means striving to conform my life to the prototype [Stræben efter mit Livs Conformitet med Forbilledet].”

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 335, entry 1879 (SKS 24, 14; NB21:9).

right thing to conduct if Christ were the only mimetic model embedded in Kierkegaard's writings, but, as I will argue, that is hardly the case. As I will show in the following, if we read Kierkegaard's texts closely, examining the *how* of the text (a reading that takes on board the mimetic structure of his writings), not merely its *what*, we find out that the author engages not one singular exclusive mimetic model in his writings, but a plurality of them.

While the general grasp of the relation of the authentic self with the prototype—that represents the model for the authentic self—presupposes the relation of an individual with one definite model—Christ as the prototype—in fact attentive reading of Kierkegaard's journals reveals that he introduces a plural number of prototypes.³⁰⁴ For example, a journal entry from 1850 commenting on how the Dane is continuously misunderstood in society discloses that misunderstanding comes from the difference that is located in the contrasting categories that are respectively fundamental to both parties. He says:

My contemporaries have only worldly categories; thus they expected and expect either that I would escape my mistreatment by taking a journey, for example, or that I will defend myself. I am, however, engrossed with the religious prototypes, whose identifying mark is suffering.³⁰⁵

An interesting remark considering the prototypes appears in another of his journal entries from the same year:

It will always be true of the prototypes [Forbillederne] that in contemporaneity their contemporaries will feel sorry for them as the most unfortunate of all people. They will be victorious — after their death.³⁰⁶

In light of perceiving Christ as the unique religious prototype—or simply as

³⁰⁴ See Kierkegaard's explicit reference to "the prototypes" in a journal entry from 1849, Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 321, entry 1856 (SKS 22, 244; NB12:167): "The prototypes [Forbillederne] are anonymous, or eternal pictures: 'the tax collector,' 'the woman who was a sinner'—a name distracts so easily, sets tongues wagging, so that one comes to forget oneself. The anonymous prototype constrains a person to think of himself insofar as this can be done." My understanding of prototype agrees with one of Ettore Rocca, when he says: "Each of the images we have analyzed is also a *Forbillede*, pattern or, better, prototype. And it is only the *Billede*, in so far as it is *Forbillede*, that shall and can be imitated." See: Ettore Rocca, "Kierkegaard's Second Aesthetics," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 1999, p. 288.

³⁰⁵ Translation following "Supplement" from Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1998, p. 244 (SKS 23, 195; NB17:47).

³⁰⁶ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 366, entry 1927 (SKS 25, 284; NB28:95).

the prototype—whose work and power are sufficient in leading a single individual into Christlikeness, introducing *additional, supportive* or “derivative”³⁰⁷ mimetic models raises some concerns. The problem of a derivative prototype does not go completely unnoticed; nonetheless, it is not explicitly discussed in the context of Kierkegaard’s imitation. Joel Rasmussen in his “The Pitiful Prototype” indicates, “Kierkegaard would on occasion employ the category of the prototype when speaking of anyone else [other than Christ] who witnesses to the truth.”³⁰⁸ The author however explains that such a “derivative prototype”³⁰⁹ is “a witness to the truth...who strives to follow or imitate Christ as the ideal prototype”³¹⁰ and as a fine example of that prototype Rasmussen claims Kierkegaard uses the Apostle Peter. This brief mention of the fact of the existence of “derivative prototypes” does not explain what their role is. Although it explains and justifies the way Peter as a “derivative prototype” imitated Christ by “lea[ving] the certain and choos[ing] the uncertain,”³¹¹ it does not, as it seems, explain and justify the problem of imitating an image of Christ, represented by the Apostle Peter, instead of Christ himself, who, according to the Christian doctrine, already is an image of God.³¹² And indeed, this mimetic conundrum proves very problematic philosophically and theologically, especially if we take seriously several instances of Paul’s calls to imitate him and his fellowmen from the Pauline corpus.³¹³

I argue for a different appraisal of the phenomenon of *derivative* prototypes in Kierkegaard’s works showing that he in fact introduces more than one mimetic model in his thought. This shows that one should read his works not only taking into account what they treat, but also how they do it. The latter involves a series of mimetic strategies of which employment of a mimetic model is part. Considering the above,

³⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 291.

³⁰⁸ Joel D. S. Rasmussen, “The Pitiful Prototype. Concerning Kierkegaard’s Reflections on the Apostle Peter as a Model for Christian Witness” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2007, p. 278.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² See 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Col. 1:15. See also a consideration of this issue in: Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary*, Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press 2008, pp. 63-4, and Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing 2008, pp. 116-19;

³¹³ See 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1Thess. 1:6. The phenomenon of imitating an image of an object instead of that object, or *mimesis* of *mimesis*, is represented in the aesthetic device called *ekphrasis* (see Chapter Three). This phenomenon of “representing a representation” (an image of an image) is portrayed as morally problematic in Plato’s *Republic*, as it deceives people that what they see is true, hence is “thrice removed from truth.” Interestingly enough, derivative prototypes are also at a certain remove from what they represent.

we have a self that engages in mimetic relation with a plural number of identity models I categorize into two groups, internal and external. Both complement each other and they are different from Christ and Kierkegaard himself. The internal mimetic models are universal structures of the human self. The external mimetic models are particular exemplary figures derived primarily from the biblical text. The former ones give a more nuanced and theoretical account of the model of a genuine Christian, by focusing on the tension between the ideal and the actual self. Of those I will consider “the ideal self,” “the ideal picture of being a Christian” and “the negative model.” However, looked at from another perspective, the internal mimetic models form in fact one complex internal mimetic model for a genuine or authentic self. We trace it embedded in the qualitative intensification of the ideal self, represented first in “the single individual” and “the ideal Christian,” then in “the ideal picture of being a Christian,” and finally in “the negative model,” which qualifies the presenter of the conceptualized image of the ideal self. The external imitative models are “the lily and the bird,” Job and “the woman who was a sinner.” In their appraisal, Kierkegaard focuses on the extraordinary qualities they exhibit and their imitators have to imitate, but also represent and enact in their existences. These qualities are therefore the fundamental and inalienable components of authentic Christian existence.

A. The Ideal Self

In this fragment I will present Kierkegaard’s categories of “the single individual” and “the ideal Christian” as renderings of his mimetic model of the ideal self. I will show that these categories represent interrelated philosophical and Christian renderings of the ideal self. Lastly, I will map the dynamics of the mimetically understood process of human becoming, demonstrating that it is based on an individual’s engagement with the mimetic models of the ideal self.

I would like to start my presentation of “the ideal self” as Kierkegaard’s mimetic model by first sketching the understanding of the “ideal” used in this chapter. Throughout his writings Kierkegaard uses the term “ideal” [*Ideale*] in various

senses.³¹⁴ Some correspond with the Platonic understanding of the ideals as transcendent, complete and immutable, or their Aristotelian appraisal as dynamic, entailing perfection, inseparable from their actual realizations, and others suggests their regulative character that reminds us of Kant.³¹⁵ Yet, I will not refer to “the ideals” in a sense that explicitly argues for any of the above-stated positions, but in the sense of Kierkegaard describing himself as “an unauthorized poet’ who influences by means of the ideals.”³¹⁶ So understood “the ideal” is linked with “ideality” [*Idealiteten*], which describes certain desired states or structures of actuality, for example: “the ideality of human being” sought by Socrates³¹⁷ or the “ideality he [God] has established for being a Christian.”³¹⁸ Apart from the fact that the ideal (and ideality) refers to the relation between possibility and actuality, it also has an existential dimension that is linked with responsibility upon one featuring the ideal: One should “present the ideal higher than one himself is existentially.”³¹⁹

My main argument here is that the concept of the ideal self is inherently underwritten as one of the meanings of the ideal. I reason that the ideal self represents a model of the self for imitation, and I identify that mimetic model in his notions of “the single individual” and “the ideal Christian.” Although Kierkegaard clearly states that the true model for imitation is Christ, still, I contend that together with his (poetic) presentation of Christ as the ideal model for imitation, he simultaneously presents “the single individual” and “the ideal Christian” as representations of the mimetic model of the ideal self. These two interrelated notions, which as such

³¹⁴ “The ideal” is a dialectical term and often Kierkegaard relates to its various meanings at the same time (See for example: Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 3, p. 618, entry 3536 (SKS 26, 122; NB32:6) “This is one ideal [*Idealitet*]: The ideal [*Ideal*] for preaching is that all become Christians. Another ideal [*Idealitet*] is this (this is the reflection): The ideal [*Ideal*] for preaching is to gain one Christian.”) In this thesis, I do not intend to make any exposition or systematic (or non-systematic) analysis of the term “the ideal,” or terms related.

³¹⁵ See for example *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 99, entry 236 (SKS 25, 347, NB29:87); *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 390, entry 852 (SKS 27, 163, Papir 224).

³¹⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination; Judge for Yourself!*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1990, p. 21 (SKS 13, 50).

³¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 278, entry 1767 (SKS 26, 363; NB35:2). “Socrates doubted that one is a human being by birth; to become human or to learn what it means to be human does not come that easily—what occupied Socrates, what he sought, was the ideality [*Idealiteten*] of being human.”

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 151, entry 1449 (SKS 26, 302; NB33:55). “The ideality [*Idealiteten*] for being a Christian is established so high in the New Testament that even if God got only one single Christian, not one jot must be removed from the requirement. This is the ideal [*Idealitet*], and this is infinite majesty. Take a figure which illustrates what it is meant to illustrate if you do not forget that there is no arbitrariness in God (the ideality [*den Idealitet*] he has established for being a Christian is not something arbitrary, a caprice).”

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 164, entry 1470 (SKS 22, 357; NB14:23).

represent a philosophical self and a Christian self, I categorize as “the means of the ideals” with which Kierkegaard attempts to “influence” his fellowmen.

To fully grasp the role of the ideals we have to first ponder over what the above-mentioned poetic presentation is and who the poet is, the subject I will consider in more depth in the last chapter of my dissertation, in the section entitled “Difference-Inversion.” In *For Self-Examination* Kierkegaard contrasts a poet with a believer.³²⁰ A poet can describe faith, but this ability does not make him a believer.³²¹ With a similar pattern, Kierkegaard, calling himself a poet, points out that he has the ability to describe the ideals, however, as being without authority, does not represent them. This means that he can describe what the ideal Christian is but is not one himself.

The category of “the single individual” is the most widely used by Kierkegaard throughout his texts.³²² “The single individual” is a structure designed as every man’s *telos*.³²³ It represents a self with a certain level of consciousness that, in due course, leads an individual to relate to God.³²⁴ The single individual is exempted from the crowd and is the intended “dear reader” of Kierkegaard’s works.³²⁵ The single individual is also some sort of an upshot of Kierkegaard’s production—as Kierkegaard’s reader, the single individual will bring awakening into Christendom.³²⁶ The culmination of Kierkegaard’s appreciation of the concept of the single individual we find in one of his late journal entries from 1854 stating “the New Testament criterion for being human is to be a single individual”³²⁷ and “[God] wants men as

³²⁰ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination; Judge for Yourself!*, p. 18 (SKS 13, 47). “‘Yes, but if you would only read one of my books you will see how I can describe faith; so I know that I must have it.’ ‘I do believe the man is crazy. If it is true that you are able to describe faith, that merely shows that you are a poet, and if you do it well, that you are a good poet—anything but that you are a believer.’”

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² Kierkegaard develops various categories that refer to being a human “in a unique way” in his corpus. For example, unpublished during his life, *The Book on Adler* aims to put in order relations between the universal, the *single individual* and the *special individual*, which is the *extraordinary*: Søren Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1998, pp. 149-50 (SKS 15, 125) and pp. 162-3 (SKS 15, 148).

³²³ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 195, entry 1531 (SKS 23, 114; NB16:32). “But Dörner is wrong in not regarding man as originally structured or intended to be the single individual....”

³²⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. and Edna H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1980, p. 79, p. 85 and p. 119 (SKS 11, 193; 198-9; 230-1).

³²⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, pp. 9-11 (SKS 13, 13-7).

³²⁶ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 407, entry 2014 (*Pap.* IX B 66). “In times of peace the category ‘the single individual’ is the category of awakening; when everything is peaceful, secure, and indolent—and the ideal has vanished—then the single individual is awakening.” See also *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 281, entry 1777 (SKS 21, 166, NB8:48).

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 293, entry 1802 (SKS 25, 342; NB29:81).

single individuals.”³²⁸ In this sense, “the single individual” is not merely a concept but a design that has in itself a certain requirement. Moreover, in a certain sense the single individual is a religious category, because a human being becomes a singular sinner as the single individual. This relates “the single individual,” itself a philosophical category, with the religious category of “the ideal Christian” in a very strong sense because without the category of single individual (a philosophical self) there is no category of the ideal Christian (a Christian self).³²⁹

Although it changes over the course of his writings, eventually Kierkegaard defines “the ideal Christian” more as a task than as a concept. Becoming a Christian “is an examination given by God [that is] continually difficult,”³³⁰ and the true Christian is the one who is a martyr.³³¹ An association of the terms “ideal” and “Christian” appears in a journal entry from 1848, where Kierkegaard relates the words in two subsequent quotes. The first quote says: “The situation is that the ideal [*Ideale*] must necessarily suffer, succumb, become a sacrifice in this world,”³³² and the following quote rephrases the preceding one in the manner of replacing “the ideal” with “the essentially Christian, the true Christian,”³³³ which follows: “That the essentially Christian, the true Christian, must become a sacrifice in the world is easy to see in the manner in which everybody...ought to go in practical life.”³³⁴ Both quotes are summarized with another following part of the entry, which explicitly links ideality with actuality, and says: “Christianity means that the ideal and ideality [*Ideale og Idealiteten*] must be kept alive in practical life.”³³⁵ In stating that, Kierkegaard does not refer to his preferences about the requirements for being a Christian; on the contrary, he states that “the ideal qualifications for being a Christian”³³⁶ have been established by God.

As shown above, both “the single individual” and “the ideal Christian” are not value-neutral concepts, but they represent a certain meaning-laden ideality and a “pregnant” potentiality. There is a deliberate design to their structures and they

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 306, entry 1825 (*Pap.* XI-3 B 199).

³²⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, p. 119 (*SKS* 11, 230-1). See also Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 283, entry 1781 (*SKS* 22, 299; NB12:103).

³³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 1, p. 190, entry 481 (*SKS* 20, 392; NB5:48).

³³¹ *Ibid.* “Being a Christian is neither more nor less, without a doubt neither more nor less, than being a martyr; every Christian, that is, every true Christian, is a martyr.”

³³² *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 421, entry 964 (*SKS* 21, 152; NB8:17).

³³³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 421, entry 965 (*SKS* 21, 164; NB8:43).

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 151, entry 1449 (*SKS* 26, 302; NB33:55).

feature a particular set of requirements that is not arbitrary. They are mimetic models of the ideal self that require existential re-presentations. In the sense of *figura* and *exemplum*, “the single individual” and “the ideal Christian” are also “images” and “signs” that refer to something more than they are themselves, which is a particular “reality” they communicate and that is hidden “behind” them. Moreover, in the Socratic sense, which I will elaborate extensively in the last section of this chapter, the ideal self pictured in “the single individual” and “the ideal Christian” is a task that Kierkegaard takes “poetically” on himself. As previously asserted, he does not want to set himself as an example of the ideal self, but rather he contrives poetic means of reintroducing that ideal by devising the mimetic models of “the single individual” and “the ideal Christian.”

Both concepts are explicitly and implicitly mentioned in relation to imitation, Christianity and the ideal in a journal entry from 1851. The author points out the importance of imitation in guarding Christianity against making it into “poetry, mythology, and abstract idea,”³³⁷ and emphasizes that it is only possible when “the single individual” is related to the ideal. What is so specific of the whole entry is that, although Kierkegaard explicitly states that the ideal is “Christ...the prototype,”³³⁸ he does not concentrate on that understanding of the ideal, but rather stresses the contrast between “making men into single individuals”³³⁹ and what he calls “the race” in relation to “the ideal.” Putting it differently, although Kierkegaard designates Christ as the ideal in this fragment, his main goal appears to stress human relationship to the ideal understood more in a philosophical way, not in the theological way that would explain or entail in more detail the *Christological* dimension of that relationship.

A similar case seems to be at work in his dialectical approach to imitation. In that passage imitation is both conditioned and conditions “the single individual.” On the one hand, imitation here is considered as an individuating “force” that makes people into “single individuals;” on the other hand, “the single individual’s” relation

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 348, entry 1904 (SKS 24, 384; NB 24:105).

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 349, entry 1904 (SKS 24, 385; NB 24:105). “If ‘imitation’ is not applied at least minimally in order dialectically to maintain justice and to set the relationship in order—namely, that Christianity involves the single individual, every single individual, who must relate himself to the ideal [*Idealet*], even though it only means humbly to admit how infinitely far behind it he is—then the “race” has taken over and Christianity is mythology, poetry, and the preaching of Christianity is theatrical, for the guarantee of distinction between theatre and Church is “imitation,” its earnestness, and the sobriety involved in making men into single individuals, so that every single individual relates himself, is obliged to relate himself, to the ideal [*Idealet*].”

to the ideal upholds imitation and secures the genuineness of Christianity. Suggested in this and two other closely located journal entries is Kierkegaard's dialectical approach to imitation. It is applied to emphasize the fact that humans are in desperate need for grace, a Christian self, and it also points to the fact that what is expected from them is subjective engagement in the process of individuation, a philosophical self.³⁴⁰ On the one hand, one strives toward the ideal; on the other hand, one strives through the ideal. In other words, the single individual and ideal Christian, as models of the ideal self, allow an individual to relate to the ideal, through which one becomes a genuine human being.

It is important to notice that an individual cannot oneself become the ideal self (Kierkegaard is not himself the ideal self, though he can represent it poetically) but what is attained is a genuine existing self, or a genuine existence realized in a particular individual (something that Kierkegaard has yet to become). In that sense, Kierkegaard's appeal to the ideal in relation to the ideal self and human becoming represents his task of "influenc[ing] by means of the ideals."³⁴¹ Those mimetic models are representations of the human ideal. They are not the ideals themselves understood in the Platonic or Kantian way. Through their imitation, one, in a process of becoming oneself, can become what these models represent. An individual through the model of the ideal self represented in the single individual and the ideal Christian is able to relate to the ideal. As Kierkegaard points out, "'Imitation' places 'the single individual,' every one, in relationship to the ideal [*Idealeit*]."³⁴²

The process of becoming the ideal self in imitation of the ideal self is to be found in the "movement of the ideal"³⁴³ that Kierkegaard calls the "motion."³⁴⁴ Kierkegaard says: "In the highest sense 'motion' is the movement of the ideal [*Idealets Bevægelse*]—and this separates men absolutely, makes them single individuals and makes every single individual introspective, so that he has enough to do with himself—but then not the slightest uproar arises."³⁴⁵

³⁴⁰ See *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 348-9, entry 1904 (SKS 24, 384-5; NB 24:105); *Ibid.* vol. 2, p. 350, entry 1905 (SKS 24, 393-40); *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 350, entry 1906 (SKS 24, 395).

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 559, entry 6947 (*Pap.* XI-3 B 57).

³⁴² *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 348, entry 1904 (SKS 24, 384). See also: *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 18, entry 3860 (SKS 24, 148). "There is nothing to do here but split [the crowd] apart, get the single individual aside, and place him existentially under the ideal [*Idealeit*]."

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 287, entry 1790 (SKS 24, 54; NB21:82).

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

In short, the single individual, through the *motion*, which is the movement of the ideal, becomes the single individual that one in fact is. What separates the single individual from men in an absolute, qualitative way makes the single individual aware of the ideal. From the awareness of the ideal comes understanding of the ideal.³⁴⁶ Striving for the ideal is presented dialectically. On the one hand, one's endeavour makes one closer to the ideal. On the other hand, being closer means acknowledging the enormity of the perfection of the ideal, resulting in the increasing of the gap between an individual and the ideal.³⁴⁷ So understood, the ideal self represents what I term as an internal imitative model.

B. "The ideal picture of being a Christian"

In the previous section I brought into focus two exemplifications of the ideal self engaged in the process of human becoming. I have shown that, by relating mimetically to "the single individual" and "the ideal Christian" one becomes a genuine human being (which as such has its culmination in being an actual Christian for Kierkegaard). In this part of my thesis I identify and elaborate another example of Kierkegaard's mimetic structure of becoming, "the ideal picture of being a Christian," which as its designation suggests is inevitably linked with the ideal self rendered in the concepts of "the single individual" and "the ideal Christian." Presentation and examination of this mimetic model contributes to the main argument of this chapter about the plurality of mimetic models engaged by Kierkegaard in his writings, but it also unfolds a more complex nature of the mimetic model as entailing aesthetic means of presentation and influence. That said, I claim that apart from presenting the ideal self purely textually and conceptually in forms of the two interrelated terms "the single individual" and "the ideal Christian," Kierkegaard attempts to bring about its

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 288-9, entry 1791 (SKS 24, 54; NB21:83). "It is not being true when someone, after having become aware of the ideal [*Idealeet*], dares be neither one thing nor the other and finally scarcely dares to exist. After all, is it not a kind of vanity to fancy oneself, insignificant as he is, capable of approximating the ideal [*Idealeet*]? No, full of cheerful courage and confidence, and like a child, one works to the best of his ability, sometimes takes humorous delight and sometimes in fear and trembling feels grief in thinking what a worthless fellow he is—but then is cheerful again, and above all indescribably happy that he at least understands the ideal [*Idealeet*], happy to let the ideal [*Idealeet*] be beyond him this way, to his own destruction."

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 287, entry 1789 (SKS 24, 47; NB21:67). "Every step forward toward the ideal [*Idealeet*] is a backward step, for the progress consists precisely in my discovering increasingly the perfection of the ideal [*Idealeets Fuldkommenhed*—and consequently my greater distance from it." See also: *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 432, entry 991 (SKS 24, 154; NB22:92).

imaginative representation rendered in his expression “the middle terms.” This expression is the Hongs’ translation of the term “Mellembestemmelserne” from *Armed Neutrality* and indicates the indispensability of the supportive imitative models in Kierkegaard’s dialectics of imitation in the form of “the ideal picture of being a Christian.”

Close reading of *Armed Neutrality* suggests Kierkegaard’s perspective on the relation between the poetic and the religious is one of the unresolved matters from this posthumously published work. This on-going issue can be detected in Kierkegaard’s employment of “the middle terms”—“*Mellembestemmelserne*”—in the work. “*Mellembestemmelserne*” in *Armed Neutrality* stands for “the ideal picture of being a Christian,” which is another internal imitative model introduced by Kierkegaard into his text representing his idea of “influencing by means of the ideals.” That model represents *the ideality of becoming*, conversely to Christ—who is the imitative model exemplified in *being* rather than in *becoming*.

“The ideal picture of being a Christian [det ideale Billede af det at være en Christen],” according to *Armed Neutrality*, is regarded as the most important part/task of Kierkegaard’s authorship; he says:

But what I have wanted and want to *achieve* through my work, what I also regard as the most important, is first of all to make clear what is involved in being a Christian, to present the picture of a Christian in all its ideal, that is, true form, worked out to every true limit, submitting myself even before any other to be judged by this picture, whatever the judgment is, or more accurately, precisely this judgment—that I do not resemble this picture.³⁴⁸

“The ideal picture of being a Christian” is presented in *Armed Neutrality* in the tension between *being* and *becoming*. “The ideal picture of being a Christian” is in fact a new medium introduced by Kierkegaard to redefine the relationship “between thinking Christianity and being a Christian.”³⁴⁹ The role of “the ideal picture of being a Christian” is, among other things, to draw attention to what has been abolished: the decisive dialectic qualification of being a Christian, which is in fact its becoming. Being a Christian, as opposed to what Kierkegaard calls a Jewish piety at rest, is a militant piety of the single individual, but also a piety that does not go beyond being-

³⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 129 (SKS 16, 111).

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 130. (SKS 16, 113).

becoming a Christian. Kierkegaard, reassuring his readers that the whole of his authorship has been ultimately dedicated to present “the ideal picture of being a Christian,” juxtaposes the picture with Christ. He says:

Jesus Christ, it is true, is himself the prototype, and will continue to be that, unchanged, until the end. But Christ is also much more than the prototype; he is the object of faith. In Holy Scriptures he is presented chiefly as such, and this explains why he is presented more in being than in becoming, or actually is presented only in being, or why the middle terms [*Mellembestemmelserne*] are lacking—something that everyone has ascertained who, even though humbly and adoringly, has earnestly sought to order his life according to his example.³⁵⁰

This quotation provides an important insight into the complexity of imitation in Kierkegaard by flagging its fundamental contentions: the relationship between being and becoming in imitation and issues with its very “structure” and the role of Christ in becoming a Christian.

First, as Kierkegaard instructs, Christ has been presented in Scripture as *being*, not as *becoming*, because Christ’s essence is already given; Christ does not need to become something different than he *already* is. The situation is different with a Christian, as the essence of a Christian is their becoming what they really are; being a Christian is becoming one, and, in an analogical way, becoming a Christian means to be a Christian. Consequently, if Christ is presented only in being, essentially lacking is the (normative) model that accounts for “becoming.” Kierkegaard responds to that with his “the middle terms [*Mellembestemmelserne*]” that represent the essentially Christian, that is human being in the process of becoming. Kierkegaard clarifies that “the middle terms,” which represent “the ideal picture of being a Christian,” are not present in Scripture. To sum up, although it sounds paradoxical, it seems that for Kierkegaard becoming a Christian requires more than solely relying on the mimetic model of Christ.

Secondly, if we agree that the ideal that Christ offers is the image of God, not the image of the ideal Christian, Christ’s role in allowing one to become a Christian is problematic in the context of imitation. This appears to be Kierkegaard’s position,

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131. (SKS 16, 113).

with the implication being that becoming a Christian is based on the imitation of “the ideal picture of being a Christian.” Again, the stress here is placed on “becoming,” rather than being. The relation between the two, “the ideal of being a Christian” and Christ, is complex. One does not exclude or complement the other, but they remain in tension. The ideal we find in Christ is complete and unchangeable, while “the ideal picture of being a Christian” is dynamic and open. Rendered “in relation to Christ as the prototype...the ideal picture of being a Christian...is a human interpretation.”³⁵¹

From this we learn important features of the mechanism of imitation in Kierkegaard. “The ideal picture of being a Christian” is not a theological or exegetical concept derived from the Bible. On the contrary, it is a theoretical construct established by the writer. Furthermore, the picture is able to grasp the dynamic dimension of human existence, because it “contains all the middle terms [*Mellembestemmelserne*] pertaining to derivatives and casts everything into becoming—and the modifications are in part related to the confusions of the past and those of a given time.”³⁵² On the one hand, “the ideal picture of being a Christian” equips Kierkegaard with means to discuss and communicate the ideal; on the other, it “makes” becoming a Christian possible.

Thirdly, this ties with Girard’s reading of an imitative model understood as an approximate model, of which imitation makes the imitation of the ideal possible. Subsequently, Don Quixote’s imitation of Amadis of Gaul allows him to have a real grasp of the very ideal the latter embodies as an approximate ideal. However, as has been already indicated much earlier in this chapter, Kierkegaard’s engagement with “the ideal image of being a Christian” disagrees with Girard’s mimetic theory, which stipulates that one can be-come a Christian by imitating Christ. It is important to “expose” the illusory parallel between Christ and Amadis of Gaul. Contrary to the Amadis of Gaul, who actually is a knight errant, Christ is not a Christian. Only by imitating Amadis of Gaul, Don Quixote becomes a knight-errant. What seems to be decisive here is the fact that “the ideal image of being a Christian” is not Christ, because Christ is not a Christian. He is a God-man; He is an image of God. By bringing about the imitation of “the ideal image of being a Christian” as entailed in Kierkegaard’s *Armed Neutrality*, we realize that the relation of the imitation of Christ

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 132. (SKS 16, 114).

³⁵² *Ibid.*

and becoming a Christian is much more complex. It appears that the two types and objects of imitation represent two different orders for imitation.

Lastly, “the ideal picture of being a Christian” is not something established once and for all. The picture is supported by another critical category introduced by Kierkegaard, namely: “modifications.”³⁵³ The role of “modifications” is to secure the essentially Christian without changing it. They provide indispensable protection of the essentially Christian “against the new nonsense that is now in vogue.”³⁵⁴ The ultimate importance of presenting “the ideal picture of being a Christian” exceeds Kierkegaard’s task of presenting the picture in his particular times, or, so to speak, for his contemporaries. The picture must be presented in every generation, and the “modifications” have to be applied accordingly “in relation to the errors of the times.”³⁵⁵

To summarize this section, “the ideal picture of being a Christian,” which Kierkegaard unambiguously presents as a human concept, is a structure utterly different from Christ. Although it both bears the characteristics of the religious and addresses “the ideal qualifications for being a Christian,”³⁵⁶ “the ideal picture of being a Christian” is in fact Kierkegaard’s own poetic creation. As will be discussed in due course of this chapter, it is an imitative composition established and positioned by Kierkegaard between an individual human being (his own reader), himself and Christ.

C. Kierkegaard as the Negative Mimetic Model

So far I have shown that Kierkegaard uses “the single individual” and “the ideal Christian” as fundamental representations of his concept of the ideal self. By elaborating Kierkegaard’s “image of the ideal Christian,” I demonstrated that the ideal self consists of “the ideal qualifications for being a Christian” established by God and of a human device of “the middle terms.” In that sense “the ideals” Kierkegaard engages to influence others have dialectical composition. They are paradoxically both poetic and religious; they are also both immutable and require “modifications.”

³⁵³ “New modifications” [*nye Modificationer*] or “the modifications [*Modificationerne*].” See: *Ibid.*, p. 131. (SKS 16, 113).

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133. (SKS 16, 115).

³⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 151, entry 1449 (SKS 26, 302; NB33:55).

In this section I will elaborate another of Kierkegaard's mimetic models I identify in his negative presentation of himself against the backdrop of his appraisal of the ideal self. The Dane utilizes this mimetic model, which I call "the negative mimetic model," to accommodate both the poetical presentation of the ideal self and its existential dimension rendered as in an understanding of the ideal self as a task for self-examination.

As has been already indicated, Kierkegaard's presentation of the ideal self is poetic. This means that his clarifications of the requirements for the ideal self are determined by a qualitative difference between himself and the presented model of the ideal self. Already in his pseudonymous "Guilty?"/"Not Guilty,?" from *Stages on Life's Way*, through the voice of Quidam,³⁵⁷ Kierkegaard illuminates his standpoint:

From this standpoint of self-understanding, I am well aware that as a human being I am very far from being a paradigm; if anything, I am a sample human being....But humanly no one can model himself on me, and historically I am even less a prototype for any human being.³⁵⁸

Although Quidam does not represent Kierkegaard's point of view, in this statement we are given an intimation of the concept of a negative model that, along with the narrative intensification and clarification of the model for the ideal self, will be situated as some sort of a counter-model. Kierkegaard's negative model is another example of an internal mimetic model and it indirectly affirms the themes of the ideal self, communication, and his own identity.

A journal entry from 1851 explains that locating oneself as the negative model is in fact necessary for bringing in true Christianity: "On the whole I think that one cannot truly speak of Christianity without perpetual self-accusation."³⁵⁹ This methodology of "perpetual self-accusation," which embodies one's

³⁵⁷ Quidam is not the only one engaging with the concept of prototype or model in *Stages on Life's Way*. Frater Taciturnus utilizes the concept while criticizing mass belief and the historical in "Letter to the Reader," see: Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1988, p. 439 (SKS 6, 406). "From the heading of this section, the reader will easily perceive that it is not my intention to remain in the aesthetic but that I want to go on to the religious. What the tragic hero is in the aesthetic, the religious prototype (of course, I am here thinking only of devout individuals etc.) is for the religious consciousness. The poet here is the speaker. Here one turns again to the historical. The prototype is presented, and then the speaker declares that it is positively certain, for it is historical, and the believing congregation believes everything, even that the speaker knows what he himself is saying."

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 365 (SKS 6, 339).

³⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 1, p. 45, entry 108 (SKS 24, 410; NB24:135).

incommensurability with the ideal, is rooted in Kierkegaard's concept of indirect communication. As it is explicated in posthumously published lectures on communication entitled: "The Dialectic of Ethical and Ethical-Religious Communication" from 1847, direct communication requires reduplication, and as far as Kierkegaard does not reduplicate what he lectures about, he can only use indirect communication. He says: "I do not reduplicate, I do not execute what I am lecturing about, I am not what I am saying...."³⁶⁰ Since Kierkegaard does not existentially represent his teaching or thinking, or in other words, his existence opposes what he intellectually claims, Kierkegaard communicates indirectly. Analogously, because Kierkegaard does not existentially *represent* what he *presents*—Kierkegaard is not the Christian ideal—he situates himself as the negative model to discount potential accusations against him usurping that position.

That discourse is vividly present over the course of his production. Kierkegaard endlessly pronounces the qualitative difference between himself and the ideal. Although he does not represent existentially the essentially Christian (yet Kierkegaard is trying³⁶¹), it is his duty as a religious poet to demonstrate the ideal, which means presenting the ideal oneself being qualified by the categories of "without authority"³⁶² and "armed neutrality."³⁶³ Through this rhetoric of humbleness, Kierkegaard establishes himself as a negative, but essential point of departure in the quest for knowing the quintessence of Christianity and, paradoxically, as the authority over what true Christianity is and is not. As "the spokesman" of Christianity he says: "I am not the ideal—but look at the ideal."³⁶⁴

Similar reasoning takes place in the already discussed *Armed Neutrality*. One sees that "the ideal picture of being a Christian" has a dialectical structure, which, among others, exhibits the method that regulates its presentation. As noted above,

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 298, entry 656 (SKS 27, 424; Papir 371:1).

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 341, entry 4532 (*Pap.* XI-3 B 47). "I am not that as yet, but I am trying.' It really is very arbitrary and unjust and on top of that senseless to accost a man suddenly at four o'clock in the afternoon, confront him with the Christian requirement, and when it is discovered that his life does not express it, then conclude: Ergo, you are not a Christian. Good Lord, I certainly am not one, but I am trying, and after all—if we are not to go completely mad—this is the highest there can be any question of—an effort."

³⁶² SKS 25, 25; NB 26, 14. "*Efterfølgelsen* skal anbringes. Men *uden Myndighed* dette er og bliver min *Categorie*."

³⁶³ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 129 (SKS 16, 111). "In addition, because the task of producing this ideal picture is a work in which emphasis falls upon differential qualifications for being able to do this...I have chosen for purpose of designation the words: *neutrality* and *armed*."

³⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 4, p. 178, entry 4198 (SKS 24, 226, NB 23:39a). "No, when he says: I am a poet, only a poet—he is saying: Look at me and see that I am not great, I am not the ideal—but look at the ideal."

Kierkegaard, as the one who acquaints the reader with “the ideal picture of being a Christian,” emphasizes the existential and ethical qualifications that should characterize the presenter. Therefore, presenting the picture is opposed to and by its representing. The judgement that is drawn upon Kierkegaard’s head—as the presenter of the picture—clearly states that: “[he] do[es] not resemble this picture.”³⁶⁵ The one who presents the picture must relate to the picture in what Kierkegaard terms “purely ideal relation,”³⁶⁶ which means that one cannot identify himself with the picture by claiming he or she is oneself the representation of that picture.³⁶⁷ Kierkegaard adds to the above: “The one who presents this picture must himself first and foremost humble himself under it, confess that he, even though he himself is struggling within himself to approach this picture, is very far from being that.”³⁶⁸ That thought seems to go in line with a parallel one expressed in a journal entry: “Every step forward toward the ideal is a backward step, for the progress consists precisely in my discovering increasingly the perfection of the ideal—and consequently my greater distance from it.”³⁶⁹

Juxtaposing the negative model with “the ideal picture of being a Christian” reveals another “hidden” dialectical realm of the image of the ideal self. While “the ideal picture of being a Christian” represents the positive model of the Christian ideal,³⁷⁰ Kierkegaard represents its negation. His presence in the form of a textually utilized negative model and “the modifications” applied to “the picture of the ideal Christian” dialectically work to secure the essentially Christian, which itself consists in the dialectics of thinking Christianity and being a Christian. This dialectic is very important for Kierkegaard’s understanding of Christianity and its eradication of the dialectical “has abolished being a Christian.”³⁷¹ Subsequently, because Christian existence is itself dialectic it requires a mimetic model that can accommodate its dialectic structure.

As has been shown so far, internal mimetic models are universal structures of Kierkegaard’s ideal self. Those structures do not only describe the ideal self, but also prescribe it, which means they delineate what it is and what it takes to be a self.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 133 (SKS 16, 115).

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 287, entry 1789 (SKS 24, 47, NB21:67). See also: *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 432, entry 991 (SKS 24, 154, NB22:92).

³⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 139 (SKS 16, 121).

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 130 (SKS 16, 112f).

However, seen from another perspective, these internal mimetic models are in fact progressive qualifications of one mimetic model of the self. “The single individual” and “the ideal Christian” demonstrate that the requirements for being a self are not arbitrary or fluent, but cogent and immutable. Being established by God, they depend on him, and therefore they are not mere idealities naturally available and intelligible to the human mind in the Kantian sense. On the other hand, our interaction with the ideal self is only achievable when it is put forward in a way that makes it more available to us, as an approximate ideal. This Kierkegaard accomplishes by means of “the picture of the ideal Christian” that is a human invention demanding an act of “modifications,” which as such constitutes another layer of human involvement. This shows that the ideal self needs to be, so to speak, brought closer or forward not as an abstract ideal but in the form of an approximating image. Lastly, Kierkegaard complements his dialectic presentation of the ideal self by demonstrating that it must include both conceptual (mental and aesthetic) and concrete elements, where the latter comprises himself as the presenter of the image rendered *via negativa*. So comprehended, Kierkegaard’s internal mimetic model for the ideal self is very complex. It is both descriptive and prescriptive. While it seems that it can be rendered as an abstract concept, it is essentially related to the actual person and its full potential is achieved only when imitated and expressed in actual life of the imitator.

D. “The Lily and the Bird”

To this point we have discussed Kierkegaard’s patterns for the self, which I categorized as internal mimetic model(s). Now I will account for the mimetic models that have a different makeup from the ones presented above. Those mimetic structures, which Kierkegaard explicitly describes as teachers of humanity and prototypes, are “the lily and the bird,” the figure of Job and “the woman who was a sinner.” As I will show, these prototypes resemble *exempla* considered as paradigmatic figures, fictional or not, who by virtue of their outstanding characteristics or actions, often tragic or heroic, become models for imitation.

Kierkegaard’s engagement with the first mimetic model comprises a considerable part of his signed writings. The theme of the lily and the bird appears as

early as his “The Expectancy of Eternal Salvation,”³⁷² and it is the subject of Kierkegaard’s deliberation in his last works, *Judge for Yourself* and *For Self-Examination*.³⁷³ In between these works, the theme appears in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, throughout *Christian Discourses*, and, actually, the theme makes the title of one of Kierkegaard’s crucial works from 1849, *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, from which I will start our consideration of the lily and the bird as a mimetic model.

The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air comprises three chapters that discuss “what it is to be a human being and what religiously is the requirement for being a human being,”³⁷⁴ a subject intrinsically related to already discussed requirements for being the self we find in the internal mimetic models. The author argues that one “might learn it, or if it is forgotten, that we might learn it again from the lily and the bird.”³⁷⁵ The requirements that stand behind being and becoming a human are the necessity of learning silence, obedience, and joy, and these three features that make us human beings are to be learned from the lily and the bird.

The first discourse is subtitled “Look at the Birds of the Air; Look at the Lily in the Field.” In this deliberation we discover that it is the Gospel’s “instruction” to “in earnest look at the lily and the bird as teachers.”³⁷⁶ A similar interpretation of the Gospel appears later on in *Judge For Yourself*, where in the second chapter of that work, “Christ as the Prototype,” Kierkegaard says:

You lily of the field, you bird of the air! How much we owe you! [...] When the Gospel appointed you as prototype and schoolmaster, the Law was abrogated and jest was assigned its place in the kingdom of heaven; thus we are no longer under the strict disciplinarian but under the Gospel: “Consider the lilies of the field; look at the birds of the air!”³⁷⁷

According to what we can see in these two discourses, considering the lily and the bird as teachers is not just Kierkegaard’s idea, but it is, as stated by the author, the teaching of the Gospel. Moreover, the quoted fragment from *Christian Discourses*

³⁷² Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1990, p. 258 (SKS 5, 255).

³⁷³ See for example chapter “Christ is the Prototype.”

³⁷⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1997, p. 3 (SKS 11, 10).

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 10 (SKS 11, 16).

³⁷⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self Examination. Judge For Yourself!*, p. 186 (SKS 13, 233-4).

adds another qualification to the lily and the bird, which is being a prototype. Here I will first give a short exposition of how Kierkegaard understands the lily and the bird as teachers, and then, I will consider the lily and the bird as a prototype.

At the outset I would like to quote from the “Introduction” to *Christian Discourses*, where Kierkegaard ponders the subject of a/the teacher:

They [the bird and the lily] are there [where the Sermon on the Mount is preached]; indeed, what is more, they are not merely there, they are there as instructors. The Gospel itself is certainly the actual teacher, he *the Teacher*—and the Way and the Truth and the Life—as the instructor, but the bird and the lily are still there as a kind of assistant teachers.³⁷⁸

The above quotation shows that the lily and the bird are a “kind of assistant teachers” where Christ is the Teacher, and as “instructors” where he is the instructor. Assistant teachers assist the teacher and instructors are to assist the instructor. “How is that possible?,” Kierkegaard rhetorically asks. The answer lies in the fact that “the lily and the bird” are neither pagans nor Christians, for which reasons they “are able to succeed in being helpful with the instructions in Christianity.”³⁷⁹ What is their role then? “The lily and the bird” silently stand as a model to be imitated by their pupil.³⁸⁰ Kierkegaard says: “Pay attention to the lily and the bird;... If you live as the lily and the bird live, then you are a Christian—which the lily and the bird neither are nor can become.”³⁸¹ The teaching of the lily and the bird has an existential dimension, and one can become a Christian living as the lily and the bird live.

A similar thought occurs in the already mentioned *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, where the lily and the bird as “the silent teachers” teach us how to be silent,³⁸² as “the obedient teachers” teach obedience,³⁸³ and as “the joyful teachers of joy” teach us how to be joyful.³⁸⁴ But how do the lily and the bird teach? The answer to the question is to be found in their paradigmatic nature. Similar to Niobe,

³⁷⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses. The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1997, p. 9 (SKS 10, 21).

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, p. 156 (SKS 5, 156). “Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and the pupil certainly is not above the teacher, but if the teacher loves him, then he wishes that the pupil might be as he himself is.”

³⁸¹ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, p. 9 (SKS 10, 21).

³⁸² Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 10 (SKS 11, 16).

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 24 (SKS 11, 29).

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36 (SKS 11, 40).

whose exemplary grief has turned her into a stone and made here a point of reference for didactics and aesthetics, and to Don Quixote, “who is the prototype of subjective lunacy,”³⁸⁵ the lily and the bird are the ultimate point of reference for Christian upbringing (paideia).³⁸⁶ Their teaching is an expression of what they are, and they can teach joy because they “themselves are joy and joy itself.”³⁸⁷ However, considered as a teacher, the lily and the bird have a dialectical structure, as their teaching has an ontological and existential dimension. It is ultimately linked with their being, and indeed their teaching redoubles it. The existential dimension of their teaching posits the choice that awaits each single individual in acknowledging the lily and the bird as teachers and as their own teachers, which emphasizes the subjective dimension of imitation. Kierkegaard accentuates, “You are to acknowledge the lily and the bird as your teachers and before God you are not to become more important to yourself than the lily and the bird.”³⁸⁸

As I contend, the lily and the bird are a prototype of Christian existence and the one who wants to become a Christian must live like the lily and the bird live. However, their prototypical role in the context of Christian existence is both paradoxical and limited for two reasons. First, as Pattison suggests, the lily and the bird do not represent the realm of the human, but of nature—the former is characterized by freedom, the essence of the latter is its outer form.³⁸⁹ Second, they are not considered as the prototype by Kierkegaard, but as a (derivative) prototype whose role exhausts itself in pointing beyond itself.

On the one hand, the key to understanding their role as teacher and prototype is the fact that, as was noted, the lily and the bird teach obedience being obedience themselves. This is however a peculiar type of obedience, as it is pre-reflective and involuntary. Being part of the natural world, they do not possess spirit, soul or consciousness. Their obedience is therefore something that is part of their nature from which they cannot deviate. However, their willingness to do X seems to be at odds

³⁸⁵ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol.1, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1992, p. 195 (SKS 7, 179).

³⁸⁶ By referring to paradigms and prototypes, I do not consider here the distinction between religious prototypes and paradigms and their non religious counterparts, who are their very opposite as seen in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, pp. 258-60 (SKS 7, 234-6), but merely to their common prototypic and paradygmatic structure as such.

³⁸⁷ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 37 (SKS 11, 41).

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17 (SKS 11, 23).

³⁸⁹ George Pattison, “Eternal Loneliness: Art and Religion in Kierkegaard and Zen,” *Religious Studies*, vol 25, no. 3, 1989, p. 385. See also George Pattison, “From Gilleleie to Østergade,” in his *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, pp. 22-5.

with human endeavour to will the same that requires freedom.

Leaving aside the puzzling logical incongruity of involuntary obedience, following Kierkegaard, the imitator is to imitate the single-mindedness of the lily and the bird and their obedience to God.³⁹⁰ This ideal of obedience and single-mindedness resembles Kierkegaard's great anthropological, theological, psychological but also sociological and ethical project of "willing one thing" that runs throughout his production, but also determines the way for accomplishing it. Because the composition of the lily and the bird is different from the one of a human being, a direct imitation is not possible here. As I will elaborate in the last chapter of my thesis, to imitate the lily and the bird is not to fall back on nature, but it is to be spontaneous, but also natural and simple in freedom, which is after reflection.

On the other hand the imitator of the lily and the bird is to exercise obedience to someone else than the lily and the bird. Interestingly, Kierkegaard shows that when an individual learns what she is supposed to learn from the lily and the bird, the prototypes are not necessary in respect of the role they used to play. Becoming unconditionally obedient, as the lily and the bird are, the individual learns to "serve only one master." This means that by imitating the lily and the bird one becomes a true Christian, that is, the one that recognizes Christ as her only master. What follows is that for such a person the lily and the bird cease to exist as "the teacher" and become "the metaphor." This can be read in Kierkegaard saying: "and if you have learned it [unconditional obedience] thoroughly, you have become the more perfect one, so that the lily and the bird change from being the teacher to being the metaphor [*Billedet*]." ³⁹¹

The volatility of the "metaphorical ontology" of the lily and the bird secures the authenticity and veracity of Christian existence; submission to the lily and the bird in the process of becoming a Christian is limited, and it ultimately surrenders the follower to Christ. Kierkegaard's hermeneutic of the lily and the bird corresponds with his critical reading of a Kempis' thought of submission to another from *The Imitation of Christ*. Although initially the Dane finds the thought compelling, finally, drawing upon the (unavoidable) institutionalization of religious movements, he rejects the medieval idea to be dependent upon a human pattern. He says:

In Book 3, Chapter 23, where the Lord himself teaches one how he shall find

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁹¹ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 32 (SKS 11, 36).

peace. Thomas à Kempis says: ‘Be desirous, my son, to do the will of another rather than thine own.’ This struck me. But the question is, where does one find clergymen such as these nowadays. If I were to submit myself to any clergyman, I am sure he would secularize my whole endeavor by promptly getting me into the establishment, into the moment, into an office, into a title, etc.³⁹²

The peace à Kempis discusses can be found in silence, obedience and joy, which the lily and the bird teach. To follow the lily and the bird is to follow Christ who “pointed away from himself [and] helped us by not saying ‘Look at me’ but ‘Consider the lilies; Look at the birds!’”³⁹³ Kierkegaard’s rendering of the lily and the bird is a re-reading of the idea of religious development as abandoning one’s will and submitting to the will of another. This can be seen in Christ pointing away from himself to the lily and the bird—the prototype for Christian life—that eventually points back to Christ. This double movement, essentially qualifying Kierkegaard’s imitation, situates the lily and the bird as a prototype for Christian life. The Dane reiterates: “The bird and the lily shall be the teacher, that you shall imitate them [tage efter dem], learn from them in all earnestness.”³⁹⁴ Hence, appropriating the lily and the bird as one’s prototype must take place in earnestness, so the dialectical structure of the prototype is not compromised.

E. Job

With the exception of Abraham, Job is the most referred-to of the figures of the Old Testament in Kierkegaard’s writings. If we draw upon his reading of the lily and the bird from the Gospels, it comes as no surprise that Kierkegaard’s reading of Job is unorthodox and puzzling, to say the least. The Book of Job has been always read as a theological debate placed within a folktale. According to Girard, its general considerations in the scholarly literature distinguish two main renderings: the rewarded patience of Job or his rebellious disagreement set against the injustice of God.³⁹⁵ As Girard elucidates, the first reading sees Job as someone who, while

³⁹² Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 3, p. 185, entry 2691 (SKS 22, 57; NB 11, 101).

³⁹³ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination. Judge for Yourself!*, p. 187 (SKS 16, 234).

³⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 17 (SKS 11, 22).

³⁹⁵ Rene Girard, “Job as Failed Scapegoat,” in *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job*, ed. L.G. Perdue, W.C. Gilpin, Nashville: Abingdon Press 1992, p. 186. “The first is the

rebellious against what happens to him, in the end, admits his position of being subjected to God. His rebellion is controlled by the narrator and can “be admired without danger because it is mastered in the end...Job represents patience rewarded.”³⁹⁶ The second reading of the story wants to put God on trial. If Job is in fact innocent, as the book admits, there must be something wrong with this sort of religion. The Book of Job is therefore a failed theodicy, and the misfortune of Job cannot be justified in the light of sincere reflection.

Kierkegaard’s reading of the Book of Job is different. To present the full scale of the uniqueness of his rendering, including the understanding of Job as a mimetic model, I will set Kierkegaard’s account of the Patriarch against Girard’s. I will show that the French thinker’s original account of the story to a certain extent corresponds with the Dane’s. Job also fits with *figura* and *exemplum* for both thinkers, because he is a model who exemplifies man’s suffering at the hands of God and his fellow men, respectively. Moreover, I will show that Kierkegaard anticipates some aspects of Girard’s theory of mimetic desire, namely, the victimary mechanism, in his account of Job.

In his reading of the Book of Job, Girard notices that the sufferings afflicting Job originate from two sources: from the outside and inside of his environment. The suffering that comes from the outside of Job’s environment is the suffering at the hand of God. The majority of scholars dealing with the story predominantly accentuates this kind of suffering. Girard is interested in the other type of suffering, which is the misery that afflicts Job but which comes from the inside of his environment and presents Job as suffering at the hands of his people.

In his work Girard gives emphasis to the importance of the second type of suffering, which is the misery that comes from within Job’s environment, to understand the Book of Job; he perceived those two types of misery as linked. In fact Job suffers at the hand of God, but as Girard notices, he never complains about that. It is difficult for Job to agree with the misfortune he experiences from “the outside” but “he complains first of all and above all about the persons surrounding him, about his relatives, about whoever remains of his family, about his entire village.”³⁹⁷ The principal misery of Job comes from those who see him suffering and therefore are

patience of Job, his obedience to the will of God. The second, the modern response, is Job the rebel, Job the protester en route toward the virulent atheism of the contemporary Western world.”

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

ultimately guilty of the suffering that he is experiencing. What follows is the universal condemnation of Job, and disapproval of his person, mockery, insults, and ostracism. This social phenomenon of universal punishment represents “the scapegoat mechanism,” and Job is a scapegoat.

For Girard the Book of Job opposes its protagonist to the society that turns into a crowd. Even Job’s friends join the mob and eventually contribute to his universal punishment. They fail in their friendship, because instead of bringing Job consolation and good advice, they add to the crowd’s persecution. Job is all alone. His friends do not attempt to understand him. What should be a conversation between close ones is in fact a perpetual accusation of Job by his friends set against Job’s endeavor to defend himself. He tries to explain himself and prove his innocence, but his friends try to persuade him that his suffering is based on his unacknowledged guilt.³⁹⁸

Job’s friends join the collective judgement on him and in that sense they establish unanimous coalition—so to speak, the mob’s concept of truth, which constitutes the scapegoat mechanism. Girard says:

This is indeed what characterizes the scapegoating process: Beginning at the moment that the persecution acquires a collective character, it exercises an irresistible attraction upon those who in principle should remain faithful to the victim and support him in his distress—his relatives, his wife, his intimate friends, his domestic animals.³⁹⁹

Fortune or misfortune of an individual decides on the position of the individual in society, as it is through one’s prosperity or lack of it that society decides on one’s position within it. *Vox populi vox Dei* says Girard.⁴⁰⁰ It means that the voice

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 187f. “The more Job attempts to justify himself against the friends, the more they attempt to justify themselves against him, that is, to prove that he is not an arbitrary victim of his ills; his children, they say, or Job himself must have committed concealed crimes that have provoked the punitive action of God.”³⁹⁸

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁴⁰⁰ Kierkegaard is far from being unaware of this mechanism, although, as we will see further down this text, he does not emphasize it in his reading of Job, putting forward a theological-ethical agenda in the story, instead of the socio-political. However, “*Vox populi vox Dei*” reasoning, much more present in Kierkegaard’s criticism of democracy and communism, is strikingly pertinent to Girard’s reading of Job. See also Pattison, “Action,” in *Kierkegaard and the Quest for the Unambiguous Life*, p. 99. “This conclusion is clearly derived from Kierkegaard’s meditation on the Passion of Christ: the crowd shouting ‘Crucify him’ is the epitome of what it means to take the voice of people as the voice of God. At a human level the ‘fear of man’ is not unjustified, since that establishment of majority rule will implicitly be premised upon the identification of an ‘enemy’

of the people is the voice of God, and, conversely, the voice of God is the voice of the people. This brings us, as Girard claims, to Oedipus of Sophocles, where the god who agrees with a decision of the crowd is the god of Greek tragedy.

Like Oedipus, Job experiences a high position within his social environment while successful, and exactly the reverse while in misfortune and suffering. What is hidden within the text is what Girard calls, “the theology of the hidden scapegoat,”⁴⁰¹ according to which “every sufferer must finally be guilty because every guilty person ends up by falling into misfortune, and if God delays a little too long in executing his justice, human beings will take it upon themselves to speed up the process.”⁴⁰² Job, contrary to Oedipus, does not submit to the decision of the crowd. He reaches for the language of his opponents, his so-called friends, and shows the reader that the crowd established him as their scapegoat. Job says:

He has made me a byword of the people
and I have become a public Tophet. (17:6).⁴⁰³

The word Tophet, according to Girard, denotes “victimization and sacrifice of children that occurred at the place called Tophet.”⁴⁰⁴ In other words, Job perceives himself as innocent and as a victim of a social crime.

The last aspect of Girard’s rendering of Job’s scapegoating is the relation between the victim and the crowd. As Girard puts it:

The members of the community need to make of Job a victim in order to feel good, in order to live more harmoniously with one another, in order to feel established in their faith. They are even ready to make of him, after his death, a semi-divine figure, and this is doubtless why we have the text of Job, whose initial form had to present a plague-ridden person who is shown to be guilty and finally divinized.⁴⁰⁵

The scapegoat mechanism is located against the traditional reading of the story according to which God punishes the evil ones. It is important to notice that Job’s

against whom ‘we’ stand united—whether this is the dissident, who claims an authority higher than the human authority or the state or the enemy without, as when Kierkegaard comments that ‘the new ministry needs war to survive.’”

⁴⁰¹ Girard, “Job as Failed Scapegoat,” p. 191.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*

⁴⁰³ Following Girard, *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁴⁰⁴ Footnote 1 in *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

friends do not understand that while arguing for the conservative theology, they are the tools of the “victimary mechanism.” Job is needed by his fellow people to conform and to re-establish their social structure and laws; therefore they proceed by scapegoating and ostracizing him. Job, as Girard puts it, “understands [the victimary mechanism] because he is the victim of this mechanism, but in contrast to so many other victims, he does not accept the verdict that condemns him.”⁴⁰⁶

To describe Kierkegaard’s relation to Job, I will start with a quote from Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous work *Repetition*. It is important to notice that the same quote opens Lev Shestov’s consideration of Job in Kierkegaard’s thought. The passage describes a person called The Young Man who seeks for knowledge on the subject-title of the book, namely, what is “repetition.” To find the answer The Young Man, instead of looking among the established thinkers of the ancient and modern times, and of his contemporaries, turns to Job. The Silent Confidant of the Young Man notices:

Fortunately, my friend is not looking for clarification from any world-famous philosopher or any *professor publicus ordinarius* [regularly appointed state professor]; he turns to an unprofessional thinker who once possessed the world’s glories but later withdrew from life—in other words, he falls back on Job, who does not posture on a pulpit and make reassuring gestures to vouch for the truth of his propositions but sits and scrapes himself with a potsherd...here [my friend] has found what he sought, and in his view truth sounds more glorious and gratifying and true in this little circle of Job and his wife and three friends than in a Greek symposium.⁴⁰⁷

The Young Man decides to search for the answers from Job over modern thinkers like Hegel, and over ancient thinkers, like Socrates. Socrates and Hegel were fundamental points of departure for Kierkegaard, and the Dane as his model in particular chose Socrates. In contrast, Job does not endeavour to gain a floor and applause, and does not give objective or scientific evidences that would justify and reaffirm his opinions. As the author of the book indicates, The Young Man finds in the figure of Job what he seeks for. The “little circle of Job and his wife and three

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁴⁰⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling. Repetition*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1983, p. 186 (SKS 4, 57).

friends” is more accurate in presenting the truth than the place where philosophical debates usually take place. That distinction between those two platforms for the presentation and understanding of truth can be particularly evident when we try to read Kierkegaard’s rendering of Job more holistically.⁴⁰⁸

In a parallel work to Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous *Repetition*, his signed work entitled “*The Lord Gave, and the Lord Took Away; Blessed be the Name of the Lord*,” which instantly brings into one’s mind Job’s famous *dictum*, Kierkegaard explains in more detail the exceptionality of Job. He calls Job a “teacher and guide of humankind”⁴⁰⁹ and justifies his claim by saying that his “significance by no means consists in what he said but in what he did.”⁴¹⁰ His extraordinariness consists in a form of existential coherence where Job acts according to his words. Without that undertaking, which Kierkegaard dubs “acting in asserting,” what Job says has no meaning.

Job’s acting precisely consisted in acceptance of the suffering that came upon him at the hand of God. At first Job was a wealthy man and a respected figure in his society, but also a happy man of a big family and good health. While prosperous, he naturally expressed his joy, but while misfortune bore down on him he behaved naturally as well in expressing his anxiety and sadness, not succumbing to despair though. Kierkegaard says, “Having surrendered to sorrow, not in despair but with human emotions, he was quick to judge between God and himself, and these are the words of judgment; ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return.’” Job’s perception of his misfortune is not focusing on his innocence, but on God’s sovereignty. What Kierkegaard notices is that Job utters in his latter judgment “The Lord gave, and the Lord took away; blessed be the name of the Lord,” and this statement facilitates the dispute over his misfortune.

Job’s life has a dialectical character that extends its influence on the ensuing generations. On the one hand, Job has completed the part of being faithful to God although suffering. On the other hand, Job accompanies each generation of those who, in a similar manner to Job, go through the sufferings of life. Kierkegaard says:

⁴⁰⁸ It is not an easy task; as Mooney suggests, Kierkegaard did not devote one work to Job, as he in a way did with Abraham and Socrates for example, but distributed the portrait of Job over several works: See Edward F. Mooney, “Kierkegaard’s Job Discourse: Getting back the world,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1993, p. 151.

⁴⁰⁹ Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, p. 109 and p. 112 (SKS 5, 115-6 and 117-8).

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 109 (SKS 5, 115).

When one generation has finished its service, completed its work, fought through its struggle, Job has accompanied it; when the new generation with its incalculable ranks, each individual in his place, stands ready to begin the pilgrimage, Job is there again, takes place, which is the outpost of humanity.⁴¹¹

Apart from being a companion in suffering, Kierkegaard calls him a teacher of humanity, and he attributes to Job a desire to have pupils. But Job is not an ordinary teacher. Job does not construct any particular teaching that would consist of a system of beliefs or laws. His narrative does not even include, as intuitively it most likely should, some kind of theodicy; God is neither justified nor denounced. What matters for Kierkegaard is that Job's teaching is identical with his actions, or in fact, that his teaching is comprised of his actions. Edward Mooney in his article meaningfully entitled "Kierkegaard's Job Discourse: Getting Back the World" reaffirms that thought, indicating that Job, as a teacher without a doctrinal teaching, is one of those who teach "by being themselves particulars so meaning-laden as to be prototypes for later generations."⁴¹²

In the above presentation we saw that both Kierkegaard and Girard give very distinctive readings of Job. Different to Girard, Kierkegaard reads Job predominantly as suffering at the hand of God, not his own people. However, Job's suffering according to both Kierkegaard and Girard is not merited. Moreover, some of Kierkegaard's journal entries bring both thinkers closer by emphasizing the role of violence in the story of Job. Commenting on the Book of Job Kierkegaard jots:

The significance of this book is really to show the cruelty which we men commit by interpreting being unhappy as guilt, as crime. This is essentially human selfishness, which desires to avoid the earnest and disturbing impression of suffering, of what can happen to a man in this life—therefore in order to protect ourselves against this we explain suffering as guilt: It is his own fault. O, human cruelty!⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110 (SKS 5, 116).

⁴¹² Mooney, "Kierkegaard's Job Discourse," p. 155. "At the start of his Job Discourse Kierkegaard reminds us that not all teachers have a teaching: some teach not by leaving doctrine or discovery but by being themselves particulars so meaning-laden as to be prototypes for later generations. Job is such an exemplar teaching ways of loss, struggle, and restoration through living out that cycle."

⁴¹³ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 197, entry 1536 (SKS 24, 415; NB24:143).

Another journal entry rephrases the above-cited quote in an even more Girardian style:

Job is concerned with proving himself right, in a certain sense also in relation to God, but above all in relation to his friends, who instead of consoling him torment him with the thesis that he suffers because of guilt.⁴¹⁴

In these two quotes, we see that Kierkegaard notices that the suffering experienced by Job if not directly, indirectly comes from his friends. Instead of consoling him they condemn him and amplify his misery. This represents what Girard emphasizes as failed friendship. Kierkegaard notices that the suffering of the single individual is often perceived as part of their guilt, which is also analogous to Girard's understanding. Job has to justify himself not before God—before whom the single individual as Kierkegaard says is always in the wrong—but before that which is formidable, before friends.

Suffering, the single individual is always alone in two ways. First, there is no room for any companionship while suffering at the hand of God because the intimate relation between God and the single individual that unfolds in suffering is absolutely exclusive. One is naked, or as Kierkegaard phrases it, is transparent, for one stands before what is of absolute importance to the single individual—their relation to eternity. Second, the intervention of the other can only disturb one's experience of what is the merit of suffering: being close to oneself while being before God. As Kierkegaard says: "Job endured everything—not until his friends came—to comfort him—did he become impatient."⁴¹⁵

For both thinkers Job is a model of authentic existence that faces unmerited suffering. According to Girard, "in that suffering" Job realizes that what he experiences is cast upon him not by God but by his fellowmen. Girard's Job is the conscious victim who does not subscribe to the victimary mechanism. For Kierkegaard, in his famous: "The Lord gives; the Lord takes; Blessed be the name of the Lord" Job embodies the mimetic model of the innocently suffering individual. Job is the example of suffering existence who seeks in it an opportunity to get close to God and to be himself truly in that suffering. As a mimetic model Job also

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁵ SKS 21, 317, NB 10: 115. "Hiob taalte Alt – først da hans Venner kom – for at trøste ham, da blev han utaalmodig;" my translation.

exemplifies the “teacher for humankind” whose life embodies and directly communicates authentic existence, which is acting according with one’s words in the wake of hurdles and suffering that are often unmerited. In that sense Kierkegaard’s rendering of Job as a mimetic figure goes beyond Girard’s account of the patriarch. This is because for Kierkegaard our imitation of Job and his life transcends a mere intellectual or emotional identification with his despondent story, which as such unveils the mimetic violence behind human suffering, but it requires following the example of Job’s existential redoubling. Putting it differently, while Girard’s presentation of Job is merely descriptive, by contrast, Kierkegaard’s rendering of the patriarch is above all prescriptive.

F. “The Woman Who Was a Sinner”

Kierkegaard dedicates two pieces of his signed writings to the New Testament figure of the woman from Luke 7: 36-50, the last of *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* and *An Upbuilding Discourse* from 1850. Both works have “The Woman Who Was a Sinner” as their subtitles. The figure of the so-called “woman who was a sinner [Synderinden]” is another example of Kierkegaard’s derivative prototype. In a similar manner to “the lily and the bird” and Job, the one who wants to be a Christian must both learn from her and resemble her. Following Barnett’s account of “the woman who was a sinner,” she becomes a model for imitation through her complete reliance on God and of her being “a fine example of a Christian venturer.”⁴¹⁶ Additionally, the text informs us that her exemplarity is based on her having a low regard of herself while facing Christ and the unfavorable crowd of judgmental Pharisees. The Dane reiterates, “She hated herself: she loved much.”⁴¹⁷ Similar to what Kierkegaard tells about Job, that he is the teacher of humankind by virtue of what he did and not what he said, and emphasizing silence from the “the lily and the bird,” “[the woman who was a sinner] says nothing and therefore is not what she says, but she is what she does not say, or what she does not say is what she is.”⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁶ Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, pp.197.

⁴¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 138 (SKS 11, 274).

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141 (SKS 11, 277).

What is she then? Kierkegaard gives a puzzling answer, “She *is* the symbol, like a picture [hun er Betegnelsen, som et Billede].”⁴¹⁹

It is important to notice that Kierkegaard presents the story of the woman from Luke’s Gospel in the context of what is translated by the Hongs as “the communion on Fridays.” The thinker portrays her as “a guide...on this path,”⁴²⁰ which is the path to the Communion table. As such, “she walks there in the lead”⁴²¹ and one must not abstain from “following her [følge hende].”⁴²² “The woman who was a sinner” is the example of someone who lost herself in Christ as Savior and in doing so one has to let go of everything that is most precious to them. She turned everything in her world into nothing, including herself; anything she is concerned with becomes trivial (“everything temporal, earthly, and worldly, honors, esteem, prosperity, the future, relatives, friends, people’s opinion”⁴²³), but one concern remains, the weight of her sins. She seeks forgiveness of her sins, and this is precisely what one should learn from “the woman who was a sinner.”

Another thing one can learn from the discussed model is the fact that we are helpless in “finding forgiveness” and we can do nothing to gain it.⁴²⁴ Lastly, analyzing her story today, one can see that one is in “a better position” than “the woman who was a sinner” was while being contemporaneous with Christ. It is by the fact that Christ’s death, which has a comforting effect on us today, was not at hand to his contemporaries. Here an additional crucial factor clarifying Kierkegaard’s concept of prototypes is revealed. Christ was predominantly the prototype for his contemporaries, and this is for two reasons, theological and philosophical. First, we know about Christ as the Savior from the fact of his atoning death. This is what his disciples experienced only toward the end of his earthly life. Second, as Kierkegaard utters, Christ is the prototype because “the proclaimer’s life expresses the teaching.”⁴²⁵ What follows, “as the prototype, no human being can hold out with him entirely; they all fall away, even the apostles.”⁴²⁶ As one can see, what is typical to prototypes for Kierkegaard is a certain redoubling that they feature; a certain existential redoubling is characteristic of Christ, but also of other derivative

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144 (SKS 11, 280).

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

⁴²² *Ibid.*, p. 138 (SKS 11, 275).

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, p. 153 (SKS 12, 267).

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159 (SKS 12, 272).

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

prototypes including Job, “the lily and the bird” and, as has been just shown, “the woman who was a sinner.” What is unique about Christ is that his standards are impossible to meet, thus he is *the* prototype.

It is important to come back to Kierkegaard’s puzzling remark: “the woman who was a sinner” is a picture or “is changed into a picture” by Christ. It is crucial to notice that, on the one hand, the thinker sees Christ’s transformation of the woman into a picture as motivated by his desire to communicate with the audience of the scene, the Pharisees (“make the application more impressive to the present”). In that communication, on the other hand, the woman from Luke’s Gospel is not treated like a real person, but rather like an argument, an icon or a figure of speech. Similar to Niobe, who by means of her eternal mourning signifies grief and grieving after an absolute loss, the woman who was a sinner, becomes “the woman who was a sinner” for Kierkegaard. The thinker utters, “This woman was a sinner—yet she became and is a prototype.”⁴²⁷ Following what I have indicated at the beginning of this chapter, “the woman who was a sinner” represents an *exemplum*, by virtue of her both tragic and heroic action. On a different note, it is paramount to point out that calling “the woman who was a sinner” “the symbol, like a picture” deeply resonates with already discussed “the picture of the ideal Christian” and the lily and the bird dubbed as “the metaphor,” which stands for the Hongs’ translation of the Danish *Billedet*, which literally means “the image.” Here Kierkegaard not only links a particular understanding of image with his notion of prototypes, which is fundamental to our understandings of a plurality of mimetic models, but also to certain indirection of imitation. This is to say that we cannot have a direct grasp on the ideal self, the lily and the bird, or “the woman who was a sinner” (and Job), but our relationship to them is and must be indirect and “mediated” through something else, that is in Kierkegaard’s particular rendering of a mediative image. Moreover, as I will discuss in more detail in the last chapter of my dissertation, these images constitute themselves a form of mediation, as they communicate something that is only intimated in them, but in fact remains beyond them.

For Kierkegaard, Christ engages the woman as “the woman who was a sinner” to show to the Pharisees and also to the contemporary reader that what is at stake is their own life, not the life of that very woman or anyone else. Although it looks as he

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 142f (SKS 11, 279).

depersonalizes her, Christ in fact renders her as a living *example* of how he should be approached, not a sheer instance; it is her who lends herself at Christ's feet "like a picture." Moreover, her example is not something distant and unattainable to the follower, but that which can and should be applied in one's own life. On the way to Christ, she is a guide and must be followed.⁴²⁸ This thought, surprising as formed by a Lutheran thinker, needs some qualification. "The woman who was a sinner" represents for Kierkegaard not a mediator "on this path," rendered following the doctrine of intercession of the saints, someone with a name and history. On the contrary, she is an eternal picture, or as Kierkegaard says elsewhere, an anonymous picture.

The prototypes [*Forbillederne*] are anonymous, or eternal pictures: 'the tax collector,' 'the woman who was a sinner'—a name distracts so easily, sets tongues wagging, so that one comes to forget oneself. The anonymous prototype constrains a person to think of himself insofar as this can be done.'⁴²⁹

Her guidance is of a peculiar sort. It requires hating oneself and loving Christ. She forgot herself, ignored her abilities in being a moral person, but also stopped concentrating on her wrongdoings and focused on Christ. Her only merit is that her many sins were forgiven and still "Blessed is the one who resembles her [ligner hende] in loving much!"⁴³⁰ As an anonymous prototype, on the one hand, she can be imitated by an individual who in the very act of imitation is not distracted by the actual person who stands behind "the woman who was a sinner." On the other hand, the fact that we do not know her name secures us from seeking excuses to concentrate on anything but ourselves. As a prototype for imitation, she is not what Kierkegaard calls "a forbidding picture," which is something unattainable, but also random or contingent.⁴³¹ "On the contrary, she is more inciting than all rhetorical incitements," which means that, a particularly defined example, model, prototype works much better for Kierkegaard than any abstract and instructive text.⁴³² Kierkegaard's focus

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 144 (SKS 11, 280).

⁴²⁹ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 321, entry 1856 (SKS 22, 244).

⁴³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 143 (SKS 11, 279).

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 144 (SKS 11, 280).

⁴³² *Ibid.* The literal translation of "hun er tvertimod mere tilskyndende end alle Talers Tilskyndelser, naar det gjælder om at følge hiin Indbydelse, som fører til Alteret" into "she is (has) more incentive than any (other) speaker's incentive when it pertains to follow this invitation, that leads to the

on using a model as a means of communication of something and with someone strongly testifies to the imitative form of his authorship I have been arguing for in this chapter.

As was discussed above, Kierkegaard engages in his writings a plurality of mimetic models. Although different in their properties, these models refer to certain idealities in their very structure. Kierkegaard presents two types of mimetic models in his works. The first group—the internal models—presents the mimetic models that predominantly refer to the concept of the human self and deal with its structure. Among these models I identified “the ideal self” rendered in “the single individual” and “the ideal Christian,” “the ideal picture of being a Christian,” and “the negative model.” I also pointed out that in a certain sense, they all designate and prescribe one universal structure of the human self.

The other kind of mimetic models falls into the category of *figura* and *exempla*. Following that distinction, Job is “the wise and the virtuous” who represents and demands existential redoubling. The lily and the bird are part of nature and embody the paradigm of “perfect obedience.” “The woman who was a sinner” teaches us how to approach Christ. These figures represent the type of external mimetic models Kierkegaard portrays as teachers and prototypes. Similarly to “the tax collector,” whom I will analyze in the last part of this thesis, they “are anonymous, or eternal pictures.” The lily and the bird, “the woman who was a sinner” and Job represent independently existing structures, not necessarily having similar structures to the human self, however, exhibiting an instructive and indicative role toward it. In the next section, I will point out a unique mimetic model, which not only gives another dimension to Kierkegaard’s concept of imitation, but also becomes a model for the thinker himself, Socrates.

Altar” suggests that the example of “the woman who was a sinner” is more successful in leading others to the Altar, than a prescriptive or descriptive persuasion. According to *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, the root-term “tilskynde” means to incite, but also to persuade and influence to act in a certain way by example. As I will show in the following chapters, this idea stands contrary with the modern spirit, where successful persuasion was based on reasons, not examples, and imitation as such was perceived as sign of backwardness, intellectual immaturity or as a symptom of a sterile, uncreative and unoriginal production. Moreover, this example entails a mimetic dimension of the human being, especially their agency.

4. The *Socratic* (Dimension and Task) of Kierkegaard's Imitation

Taking stock of the understanding of imitation in Kierkegaard as the phenomenon of following after from Chapter One and the above-elaborated idea of a plurality of mimetic models, I argue for two mutually related theses in this section of my dissertation, namely the Socratic dimension of imitation in Kierkegaard and an appraisal of Socrates as a unique mimetic model for the Dane. The first contention, which argues for a non-Christian appraisal of imitation in Kierkegaard, both challenges the dominant religious take on the problem and greatly complements it. The second proposition argues that apart from perceiving Socrates as a unique mimetic figure, Kierkegaard both identifies himself as following in the footsteps of the old wise man of Athens and as being himself the Socrates of Copenhagen, hence simultaneously performing the Socratic imitation.

Subsequently, alongside the understanding of the imitation of Christ elaborated in Chapter One, I propose to read Socratic imitation as a fundamental element of imitation in Kierkegaard and as ultimately achievable, which puts it in contrast to the imitation of Christ that although demanded proves ultimately unattainable to a Christian. However, the Socratic imitation does not contradict the aforementioned essential understandings of the phenomenon in question—themselves often complementary or overlapping at some points—but rounds them out by taking into account *mimesis*.

Following that setting, I approach imitation in Kierkegaard as an independent concept that has its origins much earlier in history than the biblical scholarship and pietistic movements, and as such, that derives from kinds of imitation embedded in Plato's dialogues. In my reasoning I do not equate Plato's and Kierkegaard's accounts of imitation, nor I do reduce one of them to the other; rather, I point to critical similarities between them. I argue that one can identify in Plato's dialogues three crucial elements of imitation in Kierkegaard, such as the phenomenon of following after, the non-imitative character of imitation, and its existential dimension expressed in the life of an imitator. In sum, I contend that Kierkegaard's imitation has a particularly rendered Socratic dimension.

At the outset, I will first give a brief account of Kierkegaard's exceptional relation to Socrates. Second, I will demonstrate similarities between a particular understanding of Socratic imitation taken from the *Apology* and *Phaedo*, and

imitation in Kierkegaard when rendered as “following after.” Third, I will compare two types of imitation from the *Republic* in light of Kierkegaard’s rendering of the phenomenon. I will show that such a comparison unveils an existential dimension of Plato’s account of imitation. Lastly, I will address Kierkegaard’s concept of the martyr-imitator-follower and its reference to the person of Socrates.

Much has been said about the influence of Socrates on Kierkegaard. Although arguing for such influence seems close to debating the obvious, scholars do not necessarily agree on the extent of the inspiration the Dane takes from the “simple wise man of antiquity.”⁴³³ Far from discussing that here, I want to focus on a very distinctive remark Kierkegaard makes on his relationship to Socrates regarding his own work as “a Socratic task.” The Dane notes, “The only analogy I have before me is Socrates; my task is a Socratic task, to audit the definition of what it is to be a Christian—I do not call myself a Christian (keeping the ideal free), but I can make it manifest that the others are that even less.”⁴³⁴

It is important to notice that this statement appears in the work that bears the mark of Kierkegaard’s concluding words. It seems therefore that the figure of Socrates spans the whole of Kierkegaard’s production in a chiasmic structure, beginning at his university thesis with the symptomatic title *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates* and closing with his last number of *The Moment*. This perspective will serve as a framework for the following examination.

In the above quote the wise man of antiquity appears in two contexts: he is the only analogy that Kierkegaard has before him, and his task is being identified with that of the Dane. Kierkegaard’s task is to audit the definition of what it is to be a Christian in a similar manner to that of Socrates, whose task was to show what it means to have true knowledge or be truly wise.⁴³⁵ Socrates’s task was to give an account of wisdom by refuting others’ claim to possess true knowledge and stating that he himself does not have it either. Kierkegaard concludes that such an ironic and dialectical strategy resulted in Socrates gaining enemies, but what is more, the Dane sees the same mechanism pertaining to him: “But the same thing has happened to me that happened to you (according to what you say in your ‘defense’...) ...namely, that you thereby made enemies for yourself by making it manifest that they were

⁴³³ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination. Judge for Yourself!*, p. 9 (SKS 13, 39).

⁴³⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 341 (SKS 13, 405).

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 341-3. (SKS 13, 406-8).

ignorant....”⁴³⁶ So understood Kierkegaard’s task is indeed a Socratic task; his dialectical and ironical methodology of presentation of the true knowledge and the enmity it brings upon him are in fact a great analogy for Kierkegaard. The task and the person of Socrates constitute a particular unity of one’s identity with one’s beliefs and actions.

One can deduce the importance of the *Apology* for Kierkegaard from the fact that he refers to that dialogue of Plato in the works that span his production, namely, *The Concept of Irony* and *The Moment*. Additionally, Kierkegaard explicitly considers its significance in presenting the Socratic as such. He points out that the work “must be assigned a preeminent place when the purely Socratic is sought.”⁴³⁷ The *Apology* thus played a paramount role in Kierkegaard’s works.⁴³⁸ What I will show further down this chapter is that Plato’s *Apology* gives us a significant vantage point in reconsidering imitation in Kierkegaard.

A. *Efterfølgelse*: imitation

I will undertake my analysis of the *Apology* against the backdrop of the etymology of the word imitation, Danish *Efterfølgelse*, used by Kierkegaard. The main argument here is that the understanding of “following after” that has been so far reserved solely to the biblical foundations of imitation in Kierkegaard, can be identified in the non-Christian sources of Plato’s dialogues. As noticed in the Introduction, “following after” has greatly influenced the reception of Kierkegaard’s concept of imitation as indebted to the Scriptures and the pietistic movements that emerged as part of the phenomenon of *imitatio Christi*. Subsequently, Kierkegaard’s concept of imitation has been rendered as ultimately incompatible with, among others, Plato’s appraisal of *imitatio*, which seems to gravitate towards simple reproduction, slavish copying and aping. Such an outlook however obscures both the complexity of imitation presented by Kierkegaard and some of the classics such as Plato. What I aim to present in the subsequent part of this work is the idea that we can re-create an

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1992 p. 76. (SKS I, 134).

⁴³⁸ See also: Paul Muench, “Kierkegaard’s Socratic Point of View,” *Kierkegaard and the Greek World*, t. 1, *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 2, ed. by Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2010, pp. 6-7, especially footnote 13.

existential aspect of Plato's concept of imitation that has bearings on Kierkegaard's *Efterfølgelse*.

The *Apology* gives Plato's account of the trial of Socrates and his apologetic speech. Socrates is accused "of being a busybody, in that he inquires into what is beneath the earth and in the sky, turns the weaker argument into the stronger, and teaches others to do the same."⁴³⁹ One of the charges leveled against him is that his teaching had a negative impact on the young of Athens. This serious accusation states that the thinker through his teaching makes the young intellectuals of Athens rebel against the State and reject the old ways of the people. In his defense Socrates explains, among other things, three aspects of his situation.

First, he establishes himself as the wisest of men calling on the verdict made by the Oracle of Delphi. Subsequently, as the wisest of men by virtue of claiming that he does not possess true knowledge, his knowledge comprises in knowing that he does not possess any definite knowledge.

Second, Socrates explains that as he does not possess true knowledge, he tries to understand the kind of knowledge the Oracle has associated with him by questioning others who have claimed that they do possess such knowledge. Socrates understands his role in examining others as "assist[ance to] the god"⁴⁴⁰ and therefore he is compelled to search out the wise among men. As a result of his "service to the god"⁴⁴¹ Socrates gains three things: he learns that the questioned ones do not possess what they claim, he gains enemies out of the ones exposed, and he experiences poverty.

Third, the revolt of the young against the established order—as Socrates explains—consists of that the young of Athens *following* the example of the philosopher by embarking on the examination of those who pretend to have knowledge. He clarifies, "...the young people who follow me around of their own accord...enjoy listening to people being cross-examined. Often, too, they copy my example themselves, and so attempt to cross-examine others...Consequently, the people they question are angry with me..."⁴⁴² The young of Athens became not only the attentive audience of Socrates, but in fact they have *followed after* Socrates in

⁴³⁹ Plato, *Apology*, 19b-c. Unless stated differently quotations according to *Defence of Socrates, Euthyphro, Crito* Plato, ed. and transl. by David Gallop, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 23b.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 23c.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 23c-d.

emulating his actions. They first witnessed Socrates exposing the lack of knowledge in those who claimed to have it, and consequently they voluntarily went on examining “a great abundance of people,”⁴⁴³ discovering only pretenders and imposters.

Socrates juxtaposes himself with other teachers who receive money for their services and who claim that they can teach their students “wisdom.” The students of the Sophists, for example, gain some kind of knowledge of the world, which the Stranger from the *Sophist* calls “supreme and universal wisdom.”⁴⁴⁴ The students of Socrates are not real students; they do not attend any classes, do not pay fees, and do not gain any knowledge. Emphasizing the utmost importance of one’s subjectivity, Socrates encourages his followers to subjectively face the ultimate questions that pertain to their lives. Such a situation leads his students to redirect their investigations from the outer to the inner realm of human life. Having their subjectivity awakened by the teacher’s direct and indirect instructions, the students of Socrates choose to *follow* him in examining their own lives and those of others.

Did Socrates really have or plan to have any followers? Socrates describes himself and his followers negatively. He claims that he “never...was anyone’s instructor...But if a person wanted to hear me talking...I never grudged that to anyone...Rather, I offer myself to questioning to wealthy and poor alike.”⁴⁴⁵ Likewise Socrates “never...promised any of them that they would learn anything from me, nor gave them instructions.”⁴⁴⁶ On the other hand, shortly after the final verdict is heard, Socrates declares his followers, who so far have been restrained by him, will bring upon the judges intensified criticism. This form of retribution will be aimed at those who by sentencing the thinker to death were trying to divert attention away from the lack of integrity and honesty that permeated their private and public life.⁴⁴⁷

Although Socrates claimed before the judgement that he did not have students or followers *per se*, after hearing the final verdict the thinker changes his strategy of communication from ironic or indirect to direct. Contrary to what he previously maintained, Socrates admits that in fact there are individuals who “follow after him,” and after his death, they will dedicate their lives to testifying for the truth even more vigorously than their teacher.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 23c.

⁴⁴⁴ Plato, *The Sophist*, transl. by Benjamin Jowett, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 3, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1871, 233 a-e.

⁴⁴⁵ Plato, *Apology*, 33a-b.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 39c-d.

As one can see, though not himself a teacher *sensu stricto*, Socrates had his students. Yet, the relationship between the teacher and the students was of an unusual kind because Socrates represents a “teacher-non-teacher” and the students are “students-non-students.” The relation between them was not based on gaining knowledge, but on a subjectivity that both characterizes the relationship between follower and teacher, and qualifies the way a follower approaches themselves in their self-examination. In “following after” Socrates, the followers were to focus on their own subjectivity and take an examining attitude towards themselves and the outer world; they were not copying Socrates because they were not meant to become another version of Socrates. Such an approach is coherent with his last words spoken before the final verdict of the *Apology*, which confirms that in his intellectual activity the wise man “examine[d] both [him]self and others [because] the life without examination [is] not worth living for a man...”⁴⁴⁸

This example from the *Apology* is not the only instance of where imitation in Plato can be interpreted as “following after.” By referring to the *Phaedo* I would like to build another argument for the proposed thesis of this section, which is that one can distinguish particular aspects of Kierkegaard’s imitation in Plato’s dialogues, or putting it differently, that there is a Socratic dimension in Kierkegaard’s *Efterfølgelse*.

The *Phaedo* appears to be a thematic extension of the *Apology* because one of the main subjects of the dialogue is the true philosopher’s attitude towards death. The dialogue could also be perceived as a sequential continuation of the *Apology*, as the scene of the dialogue takes place in the prison of Socrates just before his execution. Socrates spends his last moments philosophizing with his friends and “students.”

At the very beginning of the work, Cebes gives an account of a certain Evenus, who inquired into the reasons behind Socrates’ interest in composing poetic works aiming to praise Apollo. Socrates’ response to Cebes’ investigation occurs on two interrelated levels. The first response offers a religious account for the reasons why Socrates gets involved in a “popular form of art.”⁴⁴⁹ The thinker expounds that he followed the visions of his dreams that commanded him to “practice and cultivate the arts.”⁴⁵⁰ In a similar manner to what had been stated in the *Apology*, where Socrates follows “a voice of some sort which comes, and which always...restrains me from

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 37e-38a.

⁴⁴⁹ Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. by G. M. A Grube, Indianapolis: Hackett 1977, 61a.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 60e.

what I am about to do, but never gives positive direction”⁴⁵¹ or “the usual prophetic voice from my spiritual sign,”⁴⁵² the wise man obeys the supernatural directive that originated in his dreams. The second response occurs on a different level and changes the theme and dynamics of the discussion that follows. Socrates directs a quite unusual personal message to Evenus: “You can tell Evenus this, Cebes, and bid him farewell from me, and tell him, if he is wise, *to follow me as quickly* as he can. I shall be going today, it seems; those are my country’s orders.”⁴⁵³

The wise man of Athens both bids farewell and advises Evenus to follow him as quickly as he can. The latter response seems strange to a friend of Evenus, Simmias, who realizes that Socrates encourages Evenus to willingly part with his life if what Evenus really seeks is wisdom. The true philosopher is ready to eagerly let go of one’s life, and such an individual is “properly grounded in philosophy.”⁴⁵⁴ Such argumentation is confirmed by Socrates’ imminent death and the symbolic act of lowering his feet to the ground, as Phaedo represents in narration: “As he spoke he lowered his feet to the ground, and sat like this for the rest of the discussion.”⁴⁵⁵ By challenging Evenus, Socrates indicates that religious tasks, like writing poetry to praise Apollo, require the involvement of one’s subjectivity. Putting it differently, the religious is much more than the aesthetic and as such it cannot be reduced to a poetic production, which has only an artistic value.

As has been shown, the dialogue contains another eminent instance of Plato’s concept of existential imitation. Here, facing death, Socrates urges Evenus to understand that if he really seeks wisdom, he should *follow* Socrates in voluntarily parting with his life. What Socrates requests is not suicide, as it appears, but an uncompromising act of *following after* one’s internal voice. Evenus should not look for splendor or success as a poet—this is indirectly suggested by Socrates when he asserts that he does not compete with Evenus in poetry—but should see that Socrates’ engagement with that kind of art is a display of his unbending obedience to the inner voice of his spirit.

However, is the reading of Plato’s dialogues from the perspective of imitation as *following after* a possible source for Kierkegaard’s reading of Socrates as an

⁴⁵¹ Plato, *Apology*, 31d.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 40a.

⁴⁵³ Plato, *Phaedo*, 61c; italics mine.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 61d.

imitative model that had followers? Or putting it differently: does the above-presented conceptualization of Socrates's imitation resemble Kierkegaard's? The argument for such a position can be found in Kierkegaard's "Postscript to the *Two Notes*," where the author summarizes his relationship to the single individual.⁴⁵⁶ In this note from March 1855, Kierkegaard situates his relationship to the single individual in the context of both Christ and Socrates having followers; he says:

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

If...I seem in one sense to force the ideality of the single individual even higher, how do I understand this? ...I understand it as my imperfection, because, as I have frequently said, my entire work as an author has been my own development, in which I myself have ever more deeply concentrated on my idea, my task. But as long as this was my situation, I was not matured enough to be able to draw individuals closer to me, even if I had wanted to.—I understand it as connected with the special nature of my task."⁴⁵⁷

First, Kierkegaard facilitates a particular understanding of both Christ and Socrates as figures who had their followers; "following after" to a certain extent works as a common ground in the juxtaposition of Christ and Socrates. This shows that the Dane is attributing the phenomenon of "following after" that entails both the teacher (mimetic model) and follower(s) to Christ and Socrates. Second, Kierkegaard situates his drive to "draw individuals closer to [him]" in relation to the imitative characters of Christ and Socrates and therefore establishes his position as someone who intends to have followers, what he calls "the special nature of [his] task." Third,

⁴⁵⁶ It is important to notice, attributions of the phenomenon of *following* to Socrates are already present in *Philosophical Fragments* (see for example Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1985, p. 60 (SKS 4, 263): "By no means—no more than Plato was anything other than a follower [Discipel] of Socrates"). Moreover, Kierkegaard ascribes that phenomenon also to Pythagoras, among other figures: *Ibid.*, p. 157 (SKS 15, 49): "He [Johannes] knew that Pythagoras had commanded silence of his followers [Discipelen], that the Egyptian and Indian philosophers had used a similar period of probation."). My insistence on the emphasis on that phenomenon in the "second authorship" comes from the fact that it is where Kierkegaard speaks from his own perspective, where he perceives himself as a follower of Socrates. In the *Philosophical Fragments*, its pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus, in his discussion on Socrates, Christ and *following/follower*, rather clarifies the motif *Similitudo Christum inter et Socratem in dissimilitudine praecipue est posita* from the *Concept of Irony*, than engages in discussion of *mimesis*. Nonetheless, the subject itself will no be ultimately abandoned in this examination, as I will briefly come back to that problem in the last chapter of this thesis, where I will discuss Kierkegaard's engagement with *idem et alter*.

⁴⁵⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 125 (SKS 16, 105).

drawing upon what has been established earlier in my analysis, Kierkegaard links this “very special nature of [his] task” with his “Socratic task.” The short “Postscript” is summarized by a chiasmic repetition of the above quote stating that “neither Christ nor Socrates had followers in the sense [of] the numerical.”⁴⁵⁸

B. *Efterabelse*: aping

So far, I have shown that a particular understanding of imitation as “following after” could be identified in Plato’s dialogues. I have also indicated that Kierkegaard himself understood both Socrates and Christ as mimetic models that entail followers. In this section I will point out another affinity that can be identified between Kierkegaard’s and Plato’s understanding of imitation: “non-imitative imitation.”

The traditional discussion over Plato’s apprehension of imitation occurs in his argumentation over the role of art in the ideal *polis*. The main text of Plato which is considered to be, so to speak, a battlefield for that discussion is the *Republic*, whose heated debate gives us two main considerations standing in opposition to one another. Those considerations are the upshot of the two different interpretations of the relation between “Book III” and “Book X” of the *Republic*.⁴⁵⁹

Some scholars believe that Plato gives a positive overview of imitation in the third book of the *Republic*, but the tenth book of that work contradicts that understanding. According to this and other similar perspectives, the ultimate view of imitation in Plato is either self-contradictory or ultimately negative. Another perspective on Plato’s rendering of imitation is based on a different reading of the relation between the books. According to this interpretation, “Book III” of the *Republic* presents both positive and negative types of imitation and “Book X” concentrates predominantly on criticism of the negative approach to imitation. The conclusive role of the tenth book is to emphasize the philosopher’s criticism of the “hazardous” type of imitation. Therefore, the internal conflict regarding Plato’s rendering of imitation is to a certain extent illusory.

In my own understanding of Plato’s presentation of imitation I follow the second approach presented by the scholars. The classic exposition of that reading can

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126 (SKS 16, 106).

⁴⁵⁹ See for example: J. Tate, “‘Imitation’ in Plato’s *Republic*,” p. 16-7; and W. C. Greene, “Plato’s View of Poetry,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 29, 1918, pp. 54.

be found in J. Tate's article "'Imitation' in Plato's *Republic*."⁴⁶⁰ Tate's analysis of imitation in the *Republic* starts with distinguishing two types of imitation present in "Book III": *negative* and *positive*, or to put it more pragmatically, *harmful* and *profitable*.

The first type of imitation, says Tate, is "forbidden; for it is harmful to identify oneself sympathetically (whether as poet, actor, or audience) with other people. In the first place, such imitation would destroy the single-mindedness which must characterize the guardian (394e, 395a)."⁴⁶¹ The second type of imitation is "permitted; indeed, it is recommended. If the guardians imitate, they must imitate from childhood the qualities proper to their occupation, such as courage, purity, temperance (395c)."⁴⁶² As Tate suggests, the difference between the positive and negative types of imitation consists in the fact that, "the guardians who practice [emulating the qualities proper to their occupation] will be imitating their own ideal character, not characters utterly alien from their own. It involves not the suppression but the development of the personality."⁴⁶³ It is therefore crucial for the guardian to "tell his story for the most part in his own person."⁴⁶⁴ Tate shows that Plato's criticism of imitation is in fact a disapproval of negative imitation rendered as "mak[ing] oneself like another."⁴⁶⁵ In that sense, Tate proposes reading its positive counterpart as non-imitative (he calls it "the non-imitative style"), which is a virtuous striving to become oneself (an imitation of one's "true" self). This style of imitation is—in Kierkegaard's terms—dialectic because it is "non-imitative in the first sense yet imitative in the second sense."⁴⁶⁶

In his discussion on imitation, Plato uniquely describes both the quality of the imitative model and the imitator represented by the poet.⁴⁶⁷ As Plato suggests, Zeus, who should be the most excellent model for imitation—as the imitation of gods is one of the highest forms of imitation—has his weaknesses, and therefore one must not imitate even gods without careful examination. When discussing the virtues of self-control, temperance and self-restraint in the young, Socrates argues for the superiority of Odysseus over Zeus; the former could restrain himself, the latter was dominated by

⁴⁶⁰ J. Tate, "'Imitation' in Plato's *Republic*," p. 16-23.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 17.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ Plato, *Republic*, trans. by G. M. A. Grube, Indianapolis: Hackett 1974, 396c-d.

his sexual desires.⁴⁶⁸ The guardian, as Socrates notices, must have the ability to recognize “the different forms...[of virtues] their kindred qualities and their opposites too, as they occur everywhere, and perceive wherein they occur, both themselves and their images...”⁴⁶⁹

Although Socrates, as it seems, in his general overview disregards artists, the true philosopher is a kind of an artist. His work is compared to that of an artist, which aims at drawing a picture to represent the ideals. Even Adeimantus, Socrates’ interlocutor from the dialogue, notices that “[the artistic work of the philosopher] would indeed be a most beautiful picture.”⁴⁷⁰ Here, the philosopher corresponds with Kierkegaard’s poet who, as we discussed, uses ideals to influence others. Likewise, the work of Kierkegaard as such a poet corresponds to that of Plato’s philosopher in the sense that representation and introduction of the ideals require devising approximate ideals by means of producing pictures. As has been shown, Kierkegaard’s rendering of derivative prototypes and mimetic models fits with these uniquely rendered pictures, but, as I will demonstrate in the last chapter of my dissertation, we find them in mental representations of ourselves and others, and in turn in Plato’s rendering of Socrates.

As we have noticed beforehand, imitation has a dialectical character that is utilized in the fact that it is “non-imitative imitation.” But dialectics occurs here on more than one level. It operates in the philosopher’s dialectical approach to imitation. On the one hand, the philosopher looks at changeless ideas. On the other hand, he constantly compares these ideas with his emulations of those ideas in human beings. Socrates elucidates:

“[the philosophers] would keep looking back and forth, to Justice, Beauty, Moderation, and all such things as by nature exists, and would compose human life with reference to these, mixing and mingling the human likeness from various pursuits, basing their judgment on what Homer too called the divine and godlike existing in men.”⁴⁷¹

In his discussion of imitation, Socrates distinguishes three parties: God, as the ultimate creator (real creator), the craftsman as the manufacturer of a particular

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 389d-390d.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 402c.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 501b-c.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 501a-b.

representation of the things ultimately created, and the artist(s) who represents particular representations of the ultimate reality—in that the artist represents things as they appear, not as they are. Socrates clearly distinguishes them from the craftsmen. He also indicates that the artist is someone who does not imitate “that which originally exists in nature”—as the craftsman does—but imitates only objects that are already representations of something else. The artist then is “third from the king and the truth”⁴⁷² The work of artists can deceive children or guileless persons to think that what they encounter is real. Those creations however are only mere appearances; therefore the artist creates things that both exist and lack existence. Tate explains, “the mere imitator produces what is thrice removed from truth—an imitation of an imitation of reality.”⁴⁷³ The works of the artists, as the philosopher further defines, often are made without any knowledge of truth, and artists often pretend to have some knowledge as they discuss various sciences and skills. Plato concludes “the maker of image knows nothing of the reality; he only knows the appearance.”⁴⁷⁴

Engaging with Kierkegaard’s corpus we can discern two types of imitation, which I will call, in reference to Socrates, *negative* and *positive*. I am putting negative first to emphasize that Kierkegaard’s engagement with imitation is predominantly critical. From that critique the positive engagement with imitation emerges.

The first type of imitation is what Kierkegaard calls “aping.” Discussing the social sphere of human behaviour, Kierkegaard takes on criticism of the negative type of imitation. He says: “Men are perfectible. They can be influenced to do one thing just as well as another, to fast as well as to live in worldly enjoyment—the most important thing is that they are just like the others, that they ape each other, do not stand alone.”⁴⁷⁵ As Plato’s consideration of imitation takes place predominantly in the context of the larger social entity—the ideal state—Kierkegaard concentrates on the individual. Human beings enjoy existing en masse and they are afraid of being perceived as individuals; he says “we relish everything called aping.”⁴⁷⁶ Aping is the imitation that is motivated by the human condition Kierkegaard calls boredom and despair, and by the social phenomenon of fashion. Human beings in their lack of identity caused by the bankruptcy of religion, science, and government and in the

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 597e.

⁴⁷³ Tate, “‘Imitation’ in Plato’s *Republic*,” p. 20.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 601b-c.

⁴⁷⁵ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 3, p. 632, entry 3560 (SKS 25, 305; NB29:13).

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

advent or dawn of revolution, re-establish themselves by addressing the qualities that are currently in vogue. Those qualities come, on the one hand, from the self-contented bourgeois society celebrating the secure life of the city,⁴⁷⁷ and on the other hand from their opponents, celebrating the omnipotence of the individual who cannot be subjected to any artificial social constructs, and leading ultimately to nihilism. This lack of identity has also another dimension. The philosophical discourse of his contemporaries led to an overwhelming abstraction. Philosophy ceased asking questions pertaining to single human beings. The Socratic “know thyself” was forgotten and individuals stopped venturing for their ultimate questions. The answer was no longer inside but outside of individuals. The questions of identity were therefore directed at other human beings, who in fact did not possess the answers themselves; therefore the question was thrown into the void. Kierkegaard notices: “One becomes a human being by aping the others. One does not know by himself that he is a human being but through an inference: he is like the others—therefore he is a human being.”⁴⁷⁸

This understanding of imitation as aping stands in opposition to the second type of imitation, which I categorize as positive imitation.⁴⁷⁹ In the positive type of imitation Kierkegaard suggests that the true model for imitation is, contrary to the above presented social model, the ideal self that has been established by God. This model used to be present in society, but it has been completely lost. Kierkegaard wants to reintroduce the qualities of the ideal self, by which he understands the ideal Christian. This corresponds to the task of the true philosopher from Plato’s *Republic*. The true human being, that Kierkegaard names the single individual, will emulate in his own person the model of the ideal self. This rendering of imitation reminds us of what Tate called the “non-imitative style of imitation.” Before the single individual will proceed with his imitative action, he or she has to gain knowledge of the imitative model, not mistaking it for a pseudo-ideal that has been re-created abstractly by thinkers and represents qualities below changeless standards established by God.

⁴⁷⁷ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 4, p. 541, entry 4941 (SKS 26, 87; NB31:117). “...God wants you, wants every single individual to venture...When in infinite grace he almost jests with his divine majesty and offers every single individual the infinitely highest—to be involved with God, he will not let himself be mocked by the cravenly prudent foolery of men who prefer aping and brutishness and yet expect to get the same.”

⁴⁷⁸ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 3, p. 631, entry 3558 (SKS 22, 215; NB12:121).

⁴⁷⁹ See Kierkegaard’s *Efterfølgelse* [After+Follow] and *Efterabelse* [After+Ape].

The positive type of imitation is situated both in the context of the ultimate validity of the individual for oneself and for/in society. Kierkegaard believes that his role is to reintroduce the Christian ideal into his society. This, the importance of continuous presentation of that image to every generation, correlates with Socrates' understanding of the role of the true philosopher in the ideal society. As Kierkegaard often explicitly indicates, that is the cost of being chosen by Governance, a condition that seems to correspond to Socrates' emphasis that the true philosopher is a kind of artist who uses in his craft the divine paradigm. The ideals are—as Socrates points out—fixed or immutable, and—as Kierkegaard clarifies—established by God; they cannot be altered according to social expectation. Both thinkers, as the presenters of those emulations of the ideal, fall under the requirements of the ideal in the first place. Socrates refers to permanent self-discipline and diligence⁴⁸⁰ and Kierkegaard points to “continual inward deepening.”⁴⁸¹

Reading the text of Plato carefully we discover an existential dimension of what has been introduced as “non-imitative imitation.” As we have noted, on the one hand, the non-imitative type of imitation requires the imitator to recognize the ideals and to introduce them to society. On the other hand, however, the imitator “imitates [the ideals] and tries to become as like them as he can.”⁴⁸² The philosopher, as Socrates conveys, is compelled “to put into practice the things he sees yonder by applying them to the characters of men both in private and in public life instead of only moulding his own.”⁴⁸³ This resembles the existential dimension of the Danish thinker. Kierkegaard in his work *Armed Neutrality* claims that the one who presents the “ideal picture of a Christian” must first admit that he does not represent the Christian ideal and fully subordinate himself to that ideal. In fact, one can only present the ideal while implementing the ideal in his own life. This reminds us of Kierkegaard's discernment of the *what* and *how* of the knowledge, which indicates the way knowledge is appropriated and represented. As Kierkegaard notices, although the truth of the Christian ideal is being incorporated into the subject, the subject does not change the truth, as the truth of the Christian ideal has been established by God and is immutable. This understanding works with Plato's consideration of the true philosopher, who does not look into the realm where disputes take place, or where

⁴⁸⁰ Plato, *Republic*, 500b-e.

⁴⁸¹ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 137 (SKS 16, 119).

⁴⁸² Plato, *Republic*, 500c.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 500d.

one's argumentation can change the way things are. Therefore, the work of the philosopher is to incorporate the ideals coherently into "the habits of men both into their private and public lives," in order to assure their existential integrity.

The subject of the existential dimension of imitation will be conveyed in the following section of this paper, where the imitator is presented as someone who both incorporates the ideals in his own life and the private life of others, but also someone who personally suffers from undertaking that task—the imitator/follower-martyr.

C. Martyr-follower and admirer

So far I have argued that the true imitation for Plato and Kierkegaard is a particular imitation that does not succumb to mimicry, objectification, and conformity, and that as such it requires the true philosopher to appropriate the ideals in an existential manner implementing them in both society and herself. Also sketched at the beginning of this work was that the presentation of these ideals often ends in trouble, as the philosophers gains enemies and may lose their life.

Kierkegaard's rendering of the death of Socrates finds its representation in his concept of martyrdom. In fact Kierkegaard perceives Socrates as "the martyr," someone in that respect greater even than Luther.⁴⁸⁴ He points out both great teachers, Christ and Socrates, were tried and executed for what they proclaimed. These days however, claims Kierkegaard, this rule has changed. He says: "But both teachers and followers feel best in aping and by aping—therefore they are lovingly unanimous about it and call it love."⁴⁸⁵ Both parties entered a consensus and they eradicated the requirements for the ideal self. They are unanimous, having one voice. The true relation between the teacher and the learner is not aping but "following after," and the true student is the imitator that *follows* their prototype (model). Kierkegaard juxtaposes Socrates with Christ to show that both of them acted as prototypes for their students. He claims that both men had two types of followers: the genuine ones that he calls imitators and the rest that he calls admirers. It is the relation between a teacher and admirer—Kierkegaard adds—that produces the tension between them

⁴⁸⁴ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 3, p. 80, entry 2514 (SKS 23, 152; NB16:87).. "...I have the deepest respect for Luther—but was he a Socrates? No, no, far from that. When I talk purely and simply about man I say: Of all men old Socrates is the greatest—Socrates, the hero and martyr of intellectuality. Only you understood what it is to be a reformer, understood what it meant for you yourself to be that, and were that."

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 632, entry 3560 (SKS 25, 305; NB29:13).

that ultimately results in violence against the teacher.⁴⁸⁶ Imitation requires martyrdom, which does not necessarily mean physical death, but may mean withdrawing from the world and being exposed to various types of criticism and ridicule. Stressing the need for martyrdom for Christianity, Kierkegaard says: “Being a Christian is neither is neither more nor less, without a doubt neither more nor less, than being a martyr; every Christian, that is, every true Christian, is a martyr.”⁴⁸⁷

Following that argumentation we have to ask whether Christ is a martyr. Kierkegaard gives a negative response, stating: “Socrates is the only one, is ‘the martyr’ in the eminent sense, the greatest man; whereas Christ is ‘the truth,’ and it would be blasphemous to call him a ‘martyr.’”⁴⁸⁸ If Christ is not a martyr, as Socrates is, one has subsequently to ask oneself a question of the relationship between what one could call a Socratic martyrdom and the martyrdom articulated by Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard is himself aware of this conundrum, and we can find this issue articulated in the essay written by his pseudonym, H. H. with the symptomatic title: “Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?”

Though neglected by scholars, this essay seems to be, for a diligent reader at least, a reference to the previously mentioned fragment from the *Phaedo*, where Socrates requests Evenus to follow him by willingly parting with his life. To the objection from Simmias, Socrates says: “...is Evenus not a philosopher?...Then, Evenus will be willing, like every man who partakes worthily of philosophy. Yet perhaps he will not take his own life, for that, they say, is not right”⁴⁸⁹ Subsequently, Socrates’ claim is being rephrased by Cebes who says: “How do you mean, Socrates, that this is not right to do oneself violence, and yet that the philosopher will be willing to follow one who is dying?”⁴⁹⁰

As has been stated above, Socrates requires Evenus to seek the true life devoid of compromise and (often) leading to clashes with the established order. Using the phrase from the *Apology*, Socrates aims for Evenus to be one of the prosecutors that are to come after the death of their master.⁴⁹¹ Such understanding of the follower-

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 420, entry 963 (SKS 21, 136; NB7:111). “This way it went with Socrates and also, proportionately, with Christ: they had many admirers and among those many admirers also some who knew how to admire—but of imitators they had very few...An admirer is himself a being different from the one admired; an imitator is himself the admired.”

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 190, entry 481 (SKS 20, 392; NB5:48).

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 160, entry 2652 (SKS 21, 327; NB10:139).

⁴⁸⁹ Plato, *Phaedo*, 61c-d.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 61d.

⁴⁹¹ Plato, *Apology*, 39 c.

imitator-martyr can also be found in the martyr from H.H.'s essay. The martyr aims to secure the integrity of her own life and to influence others by means of awakening.⁴⁹² The works of the martyr, who is the follower of Christ, will find their own followers; subsequently the martyr will gain her own imitators. The author of the essay says:

What does a human being achieve by being sacrificed for the truth, or...by allowing others to become guilty of putting him to death for the truth? (a) His achievement is that he remains faithful to himself and fulfills absolutely his duty to the truth. (b) ...he perhaps has an awakening effect and thus helps truth to be victorious. (c) ...his death for the sake of the truth will stand as an awakening example for later generations.⁴⁹³

The martyr in her act of martyrdom does not imitate Christ, because that would be blasphemous. However, taking into account the context of Plato's dialogues for this essay of H.H., we read that what is at stake is imitation presented in a Socratic manner. Moreover, reading Kierkegaard's life as a form of martyrdom, one could interpret his life as Socratic martyrdom.

In brief, it suffices to say, Socrates was an extraordinary kind of teacher who had a particular type of followers. The thinker perceived himself as having a task given by god and gave himself almost indiscriminately to the potential learners teaching about the virtues and the importance of one's subjectivity to oneself. Socrates had a mission of examining himself and others, and in that he perceived the core of philosophy. His teaching was not driven into the void as it succeeded with a group of followers and a death sentence. Among those followers was Kierkegaard.

Additionally, I demonstrated a striking resemblance between particular renderings of imitation in Plato's dialogues and in the works (and life) of Kierkegaard. Far from equalling these two comprehensions, or reducing one to the other, I attempted to draw attention to the striking similarities between Plato's and Kierkegaard's accounts of imitation. Among these I pointed out the phenomenon of following after, the non-imitative imitation, and the existential dimension of imitation represented in the life of the imitator-follower-martyr.

⁴⁹² Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 88 (SKS 16, 68). "In this age, even for a martyr to be of benefit, he must have reflection in order to implicate the age in such a way that it actually gets caught when it puts him to death—and that then the awakening [Opvækkelsen] can follow."

⁴⁹³ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 72 (SKS 11, 76-7).

In conclusion, I argued for two ideas in this chapter: a plurality of imitative models in Kierkegaard's oeuvre and the Socratic dimension of his concept of imitation; both of which I discussed reading Kierkegaard's texts (and especially those on imitation) from the perspective of *mimesis*. In the first part of this chapter, by elaborating the mimetic concepts of the structure for the human self and *exempla*, I identified the internal and external imitative models and I demonstrated that Kierkegaard engages both types in his writings. This stands in contradiction to the dominant understanding of Kierkegaard's imitation that recognizes Christ as the only particular mimetic model.

Taking stock of the above, I have shown that Kierkegaard puts forward another and unique type of imitative model, Socrates. I contended that Kierkegaard portrays the Greek philosopher as a model of genuine selfhood and a precondition to being a Christian, although Socrates comes to the picture as a non-Christian, and as representing seemingly non-Christian values and religiousness. By a close reading of Plato's portrayal of Socrates, I contributed an additional appraisal of Kierkegaard's imitation, showing that the notion of "following after" in the Dane's oeuvre has its roots much earlier on in time than the scriptural scholarship and *imitatio Christi*. By identifying the mimetic structure of the imitator-follower, the imitative model, the task of imitation, and by indicating positive and negative types of imitation in Socrates and Kierkegaard, I demonstrated that the rendering of imitation from Plato's dialogues is the foundation of the understanding of the problem in question for the Dane.

These findings will contribute to the three main thoughts this thesis argues: a broadly understood mimetic dimension of human becoming, "the non-imitative" type of imitation Kierkegaard embraces and the mimetic structure of Kierkegaard's oeuvre; these I will gradually explore and debate in the following chapters.

III. CHAPTER THREE: RE-PRESENTATION

In the previous chapters I focused on presenting and discussing the concept and role of imitation in Kierkegaard's authorship. The backdrop for that analysis was chiefly his deliberation on the religious and the existential. Drawing upon current academic appraisals of the problem and analyzing Kierkegaard's thought in relation both to the notion of a mimetic model and to considerations of imitation in Plato, I contended that Kierkegaard's imitation entails more than one privileged mimetic model and has a Socratic component.

This chapter explores another facet of Kierkegaard's employment of *mimesis*, namely representation. I will examine what "re-presentation" is in Kierkegaard and how he employs it in his authorship, emphasizing that it is often determined by the object made present in the act of representation and by the mode of making that object present. Crucial for this investigation is the very distinctive mode of representation, namely, *ekphrasis*. This mimetically-qualified term designates the phenomenon of re-presenting in one medium what has already been made present in another, or presenting one idea across several media. A modern example of the former is a cinematic rendering of a book. An instance of the latter is a comic novel, where the two media of text and image work together to make a particular idea present.

The main aim of the present chapter, on the one hand, is to reveal the representational and thus to a large extent the aesthetic breadth of Kierkegaard's engagement with *mimesis*. I show here that a thorough analysis of the form and the means of presentation of the religious reveals that the aesthetic and the religious in Kierkegaard are not mutually exclusive, but interconnected. My intention is also to exhibit a close relationship between them. I demonstrate that the imitative and the representational renderings of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard's writings are interrelated. On the other hand, I show that the form and means of presentation in Kierkegaard greatly influence reception of that which is made present. This is to say that Kierkegaard's various attempts at representation are not value-neutral, rather they are deliberately structured to steer the recipient (or reader) towards particular tasks.

I find examples of the representational dimension of the concept of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard's accounts of religious ideals, his communication with the intended reader, and his presentations of the ideal self in the text. In order to identify, conceptualize and analyze *mimesis* (understood in terms of representation) in his

oeuvre, I make recourse to *eikastic* and *fantastic mimeses*, and the aesthetic devices of *ekphrasis*.⁴⁹⁴ Subsequently, I will first present Kierkegaard's "usage" of *ekphrasis* where he addresses the problem of religious aesthetics, in particular the issue of art's capacity to represent "the Crucified Christ." Second, drawing on my deliberations in the previous chapter on one of Kierkegaard's internal mimetic models, "the ideal picture of being a Christian" from *Armed Neutrality*, I will consider its representational breadth. This will show that, viewed from the perspective of *ekphrasis*, Kierkegaard's archetype of a genuine Christian displays poetic and therefore non-religious features. By referring to *eikastic* and *fantastic mimeses*, I will address the "how" of Kierkegaard's communication with the reader and illustrate that contains various mimetic structures, such as "deceiving into truth" and Kierkegaard's existential project.

My argumentation will proceed as follows. After presenting a general outline of the mimetic modes of representation (of *ekphrasis* and *eikastic* and *fantastic mimeses*) and sketching their philosophical backgrounds, I will situate them in Kierkegaard's literary production and show that they play a crucial role in his authorship. Establishing their operative presence serves to strengthen the main contention of this dissertation, namely, that his corpus has a fundamental mimetic dimension. The present chapter will both position Kierkegaard's production in a broader historical and intellectual context and articulate the distinctive shape various modes of representation acquire in his work.

1. *Ekphrasis*

Contrary to the prevailing appraisal of Kierkegaard's employment of *mimesis*, according to which an imitator engages with a single mimetic model (Christ), I showed in Chapter Two that the Dane introduces numerous mimetic models in his writings. As I signaled in the Introduction, that exposition problematizes the status of

⁴⁹⁴ For the economy of this presentation, I am not considering another important aspect of representational *mimesis* in Kierkegaard's production, namely his own self-presentation. Though, an analysis of his authorship from the perspective of *diegesis-mimesis* shows his mode of self-presentation exhibits deeply mimetic features like "concealing" behind various speaking, narrating, and authorial voices in his writings. Interestingly enough, this mode of self-presentation would not find approval in the eyes of Plato, who condemns the mimetic mode of presentation (speaking in someone's voice, for instance), paradoxically, through the voice of Socrates, not in his own voice. See: Plato, *Republic*, 392-294d and Stephen Halliwell, "Diegesis – Mimesis" in *Handbook of Narratology*, ed. by Peter Hühn, Jan Christoph Meister, John Pier, Wolf Schmid, Berlin: De Gruyter 2014, p. 129.

the relation between the prototype—understood as Christ—and the derivative prototypes. From a theological perspective, by imitating a representation of Christ (the Apostle Peter for instance) the imitator engages in an imitation of an image of an image, as Christ is already an image of God. If Christ is the complete and perfect image of God, what is the reason for introducing derivative prototypes? From a philosophical perspective—following Plato’s rendering of *mimesis* as an imitation of ideals for instance—by imitating an image of the ideal represented in the actual work of art by a painter, sculptor or poet, we misrepresent the central concern of genuine *mimesis*. As a consequence, Plato’s diagnosis of this kind of *mimesis* of *mimesis* has an evaluative component. In the *Republic*, Socrates claims that a painter represents not what already exists in nature but its imitative representation; the painter is therefore “at the third remove from the essential nature of the thing...third in succession from the throne of truth.”⁴⁹⁵ Art, understood as fine art, imitates the work of craftsmen whose production is already an imitation of something else, namely the true reality. Artistic representations (in painting or sculpture) of objects that are already themselves representations of something else signify the mimetic phenomenon of *ekphrasis*. Plato is critical of this kind of imitation, and his negative appraisal is consistent with the understanding of the role of art in society—including textual (or rhetorical) representations of artistic objects—that he puts forward in his dialogues. How does this relate to Kierkegaard’s engagement with imagery?

Following Plato’s rendering of *ekphrasis*—in which *mimesis* is understood in the sense of imitation—one would have to charge Kierkegaard with allegations of internal contradiction: if the Dane aims to imitate ideals, then through his *mimesis* of *mimesis* he inevitably fails, as he imitates an image or, to put it plainly, a mere semblance of the real thing. In this light, his intellectual reformulation of the Christian ideal as something else is just one more contingent construct among others and corresponds with the work of an artist who represents that which is at a remove from truth. Consequently, Kierkegaard’s grandiose endeavour to redefine the religious and to represent it by (among other means) showing its difference from the aesthetic inevitably reintroduces the aesthetic, as it were, through the back door of his system. What Kierkegaard offers ultimately seems to boil down to a theory of human

⁴⁹⁵ Plato, *Republic*, 597e.

appropriation of the contingent, not the essential, and religious experience thus appears to amount to nothing more than a more refined aesthetic experience.

My intention here is not to defend Kierkegaard's reasoning, rather to show that attention to the aesthetic dimension of this representational kind of *mimesis* in certain texts can clarify the relation he articulates between the prototype and the derivative prototypes. I will "justify" Kierkegaard's engagement with *ekphrasis* by signposting his complex understanding of image, which as a medium is capable of conveying a particular type of information pertinent to Christian being and becoming.

Bringing forth two distinctive images employed by Kierkegaard in his works, namely, "the image of the ideal Christian" and the "image of the Crucified Christ," I will illuminate their *ekphrastic* dimension and simultaneously interpret them as a part of Kierkegaard's engagement with the contemporary discourse on *mimesis*, in particular with Lessing.

Initially *ekphrasis* was related to how objects exist and are presented.⁴⁹⁶ Across the history of literature, art, and philosophy, the classic rendering of *ekphrasis* as mainly a rhetorical device evolves and expands. Among the modern considerations of *ekphrasis*, the dominant discussion focuses on the issue of the verbal representation of visual representation and *vice versa*. The problem of whether a verbal representation can represent—that is, make present—its object in the same way as a visual representation leads us to another issue pertinent to *ekphrasis*: making present (re-presenting) the non-representable. Indeed, I will argue that Kierkegaard attempts to employ images in this latter sense (of representing the unrepresentable) through recourse to a synergic conception of *ekphrasis*, understood as enhancing the original idea through a multitude of *ekphrastic* actions. This reading contributes to the debates in aesthetics among Kierkegaard's early contemporaries, who either perceived different forms of medium as equally expressive (*ut pictura poesis*) or argued for the superiority of one medium over the other as a key factor in successful representation.⁴⁹⁷

One of the first systematic treatments of these issues can be found in Lessing's rendering of *ekphrasis* in his *Laocoön*—a work broadly discussed among the

⁴⁹⁶ On *ekphrasis* see: Simon Goldhill, "What is *Ekphrasis* for?," *Classical Philology*, vol. 102, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1-19 and Frederick Burwick, *Romanticism: Keywords*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2015, pp. 66-73.

⁴⁹⁷ See in this regard: Barbara Maria Stafford, *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting*, Cambridge: MIT Press 1999, p. 55.

Romantics and to which Kierkegaard refers in *Either/Or*.⁴⁹⁸ As the subtitle of the work suggests—*An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*—Lessing discusses the difference between poetic production (art with words) and visual production (art with physical objects). Taking into account the structures of both media, Lessing embarks on an analysis of the representational and communicative capacities of poetry and painting. He approaches this in his discussion of the relation between the portrayal of the mythical figure of Laocoön in Virgil’s *Aeneid* and the sculpture of Laocoön by an unknown artist. According to Lessing, both poetry and painting are independent and, moreover, each can express certain qualities that the other cannot.⁴⁹⁹ A central thought of Lessing can be discerned in that discussion: poetry has a superior relation to painting as its application is more extensive and it can represent the realms of which painting falls short. As observed by Lessing, painting can only represent a moment; poetry, on the contrary, has the ability to represent a certain continuity and therefore can bring about a wider spectrum of qualities of what it represents. More importantly, as poetry is armed with all those qualities painting lacks, it appeals to the recipient with greater strength and makes her experience more complex.⁵⁰⁰

Central to Lessing’s characterization of poetry and painting in this way are his understanding of *ekphrasis* as a device that is capable of representing an idea in artistic media and his elevation of beauty as the decisive category in assessing the quality of the given representation. Art aims at representing the beautiful, not

⁴⁹⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either Or I*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1987, p. 169 (SKS 2, 167). See also: Steven P. Sondrup, “Virgil: From Farms to Empire: Kierkegaard’s Understanding of a Roman Poet,” *Kierkegaard and the Roman World, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 3, ed. by Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2009, p. 207.

⁴⁹⁹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, transl. by Ellen Frothingham, Boston: Roberts Brothers 1874, p. 90. “Since painting, because its signs or means of imitation can be combined only in space, must relinquish all representations of time, therefore progressive actions, as such, cannot come within its range. It must content itself with actions in space; in other words, with mere bodies, whose attitude lets us infer their action. Poetry, on the contrary—.”

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-70, pp. 77-82, and pp. 88-9. “There are picturesque and unpicturesque facts, and the historian may relate the most picturesque without picturesqueness, as the poet can make a picture of those least adapted to the painter’s use. To regard the matter otherwise is to allow ourselves to be misled by the double meaning of a word. A picture in poetry is not necessarily one which can be transferred to canvas. But every touch, or every combination of touches, by means of which the poet brings his subject so vividly before us that we are more conscious of the subject than of his words, is picturesque, and makes what we call a picture; that is, it produces that degree of illusion which a painted picture is peculiarly qualified to excite, and which we in fact most frequently and naturally experience in the contemplation of the painted canvas. Experience shows that the poet can produce this degree of illusion by the representation of other than visible objects. He therefore has at his command whole classes of subjects which elude the artist.”

particular instances of it,⁵⁰¹ but its role does not end here. On the contrary, “in [Lessing’s] view readers and audiences are involved in the production process...He regards the recipients of artworks as necessary for the work to be completed in the sense of an inner re-creation of the poetic world.”⁵⁰² The audience receives art in space and time (but not at the same time) and these dimensions characterize painting and poetry respectively: “The world produced in literature is essentially temporal: the author’s time merges by way of the work with the reader’s time; the space of the painter and the sculptor is the space of the observer.”⁵⁰³ Although temporality governs the realm of words and sounds—it takes time to think, write and read what is written—a particular understanding of time characterizes the way the art of painting is appropriated: time comprehended in terms of the *moment*.

How does Lessing’s understanding of *mimesis* and *ekphrasis* relate to Kierkegaard’s production? It seems that Kierkegaard, although significantly inspired by Lessing’s aesthetics, offers alternative understandings of these two concepts, which is especially evident in the Dane’s multidimensional understanding of the image and its central role in his philosophy.⁵⁰⁴ Kierkegaard reads *ekphrasis* as a cooperation and synergy of various artistic media, contrary to Lessing’s privileging of one particular medium. Moreover, as I will show in this and the final chapter of this dissertation, Kierkegaard’s understanding of the image is complex and greatly informs not only the aesthetic dimension of his engagement with *mimesis*, but also his theory of one’s thinking and acting in the world.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63. “But since, among the antiques that have been unburied, there are specimens of both kinds, we should discriminate and call only those works of art which are the handiwork of the artist, purely as artist, those where he has been able to make beauty his first and last object. All the rest, all that show an evident religious tendency, are unworthy to be called works of art.”

⁵⁰² Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, pp. 188-9.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁵⁰⁴ It is important to note that Kierkegaard draws upon Lessing’s aesthetics extensively and not just the latter’s account of Christianity and the famous discussion of “Lessing’s ditch” and “the leap of faith.” See for example Kierkegaard’s endorsement of Lessing’s understanding of the medium of poetry in his pseudonymous *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1980, p. 132 (SKS 4, 433). “The words and the speaking, no matter how short when regarded *in abstracto*, always have a certain continuity for the reason that they are heard in time. But the sudden is a complete abstraction from continuity, from the past and from the future.” Kierkegaard is also inspired in other ways by Lessing’s aesthetic theory when he discusses which medium is capable of expressing “romantic love” and “martial love,” “hero” and “cross-bearer,” etc. See: Søren Kierkegaard, *Either Or 2*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1987, p. 135-7 (SKS 3, 134-7). See also an interesting but brief account of the problem in Antony Aumann, “Kierkegaard, Paraphrase, and the Unity of Form and Content,” *Philosophy Today*, vol. 57, no. 4, 2103, pp. 376–87.

It will be especially valuable for the present investigation to attend to Bo Kampman Walther's "definition" of the moving image in Kierkegaard in his article "Reflections on a Strange Figure (or a Moving Image)." He writes:

Kierkegaard's image is highly self-contained, although it responds to the cognitive faculties of the spectator in approximating the painter's art of giving form to the unseen. Its pictorial pith is that of ekphrasis, a guileful mode of achieving verisimilitude through *enargeia*. Thus the dynamic of the radically imposed subjunctive in the passage—the stationary, yet movable spring—takes precedence over actual, visual recording, simultaneously convincing the spectator that the replica of course and stasis are in fact animated and brought to life.⁵⁰⁵

Walther articulates this reading of the image—which will be a recurring point of reference in this dissertation—through a consideration of Kierkegaard's concept of the moment. To grasp the moment, or to be able to write about it, Walther argues that it is requisite to find a device or tool that can seize and represent the immediate and the eternal or the aesthetic and the religious. This aptitude is something that is rooted in the very structure of imagery as he defines it. Following this understanding of the image in Kierkegaard, I will address two examples of Kierkegaard's engagement with images. First, I will present Kierkegaard's "picture of the crucified Christ" as a counter-image to Lessing's rendering of the visual. Second, I will explore the ekphrastic dimension of Kierkegaard's internal mimetic model discussed in the previous chapter, "the ideal image of a Christian," and finally read both images in terms of Kierkegaard's engagement with *ekphrasis* understood as mutually reinforcing synergy.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁵ Bo Kampmann Walther, "Reflections on a Strange Figure (or a Moving Image)," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2001, p. 238.

⁵⁰⁶ On *ekphrasis* in this context see: Shadi Bartsch and Jaś Elsner "Eight Ways of Looking at an Ekphrasis," *Classical Philology*, vol. 102, no. 1, 2007, pp. i-vi; Ruth Webb, "Ekphrasis Ancient and Modern: the Invention of a Genre," *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal / Visual Enquiry*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1999, pp.7-18; and James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993.

⁵⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, p.184 (SKS 12, 184).

A. The Image of the Crucified Christ

Through the pseudonymous author of *Practice in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus, Kierkegaard claims that the true visual representation of Christ falls into two types of “depictions”—lowliness and loftiness. He writes:

Surely you will easily see, surely also easily understand...that his life, the life of the prototype, can be depicted in two ways: in the one case, lowliness and abasement are the image, and far away only suggested as the object of faith, is the loftiness; the other image is the loftiness, and far, far in the background, like an almost forgotten memory, lie the lowliness and the abasement. But since it is indeed from on high that he is drawing you, illusion lies all too close.⁵⁰⁷

According to this passage, the imagistic representation of the life of Christ as the prototype—which already signals the idea of an image of an image—has a dialectical structure. The first image we encounter “depicts” lowliness and abasement, while the realm of Christ’s loftiness is hidden in the background. In the second instance we have the reverse situation: we confront Christ’s loftiness first before encountering lowliness and abasement. In both cases, what is emphasized is the fact that “illusion lies all too close,” which suggests a danger, or a situation that requires a particularly careful and wary attitude on the part of the one who approaches the picture. How can that kind of picture be presented? And what is the appropriate medium for it?

We find an answer to these questions in Kierkegaard’s deliberations (*à la* Lessing) on the representational capacities of the arts of poetry and painting in *Either/Or*. Following his reflections on aesthetic beauty and that which it can represent, and the moment, its aesthetic effect and the sequential nature of time, a public official concludes that neither of the arts in question can represent humility because what is required is a presentation of humility’s “continuous coming into existence.”⁵⁰⁸ Following that, the author notes, “art...portrayed Christ as the image of

⁵⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, p.184 (SKS 12, 184).

⁵⁰⁸ Kierkegaard, *Either-Or 2*, pp. 135 (SKS 3, 134). “Humility is hard to portray precisely because it is sequence, and whereas the observer needs to see pride only at its climax, in the second case he really needs to see something that poetry and art cannot provide, to see its continuous coming into existence, for it is essential to humility to come into existence continuously, and if this is shown to him in its ideal moment, he misses something, for he senses that its true ideality consists not in its being ideal at the moment but in its being continuous.”

patience,”⁵⁰⁹ but he claims that this portrayal misses the point, because Christ should be portrayed not in patience, but in suffering. Alas, “long-suffering cannot be portrayed artistically, for the point of it is incommensurable with art; neither can it be poetized, for it requires the protraction of time.”⁵¹⁰ It is “the image of the crucified Christ,” an image of horror and ugliness, that has the capacity to represent the Savior truly, and we can find instances of this image in the works of H.H. and Anti-Climacus.

H.H.’s account of “the image of the crucified Christ” in “Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?” begins with the classic fairytale line: “Once upon a time there was a man....”⁵¹¹ As it unfolds, the fairytale gradually becomes a horror story. The man from his childhood develops an extraordinary relation to a certain picture, a relation which causes some abnormalities in the body of the man. The man experiences a reversal of time in his biological functions: “although a child, he was already old like an old man.”⁵¹² The picture, to which he has been exposed from the beginning of his childhood, turns out to be a vision of the torment and execution of “the Crucified One.” It is not just a physical picture or painting. The picture serves as a model that represents the “Savior,” and is “the one and the only impression he had of the Savior.”⁵¹³ Thus the only expression of Christ available to the man was the dreadfulness of the crucifixion of Christ that the narrator calls “the horror to take place.”⁵¹⁴

The practice of sustained attention to the sacrificial expression of Christ was a signature of the Moravian community in which Kierkegaard reared.⁵¹⁵ He gives a corresponding account of that pietistic practice, dubbing it “all this staring at Christ’s suffering.”⁵¹⁶ The experience of the revelation of both the highest power and the

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹¹ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 55 (SKS 11, 61). The phrase “Once upon a time” establishes the fairytale mood, but the mood is not about something silly, trivial, pointless, or unimportant. It is not just to puzzle the reader, as Lee C. Barrett suggests in “Kierkegaard on the Problem of Witnessing while Yet Being a Sinner,” in *Without Authority, The International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 18, ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Macon: Mercer University Press 1985, p. 150. On the contrary it brings to mind the poetics of a hero, the imagination and the visual; cf. George Pattison, “Who is the Discourse?,” *Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 16, 1993, pp. 32f.

⁵¹² Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 55 (SKS 11, 61).

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ Andrew Burgess, “Kierkegaard, Moravian Missions, and Martyrdom,” in *Without Authority*, ed. by Robert L. Perkins, p. 182.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 183.

presence of violence and divinity in unison produces the *mysterium fascinans*⁵¹⁷ in the man. He is simultaneously attracted and repelled by the divine-violent picture. H.H. compares his story to an artist “who in anguish of conscience could not stop looking back at the picture of the murdered man who was pursuing him, so he, too, motivated by love, could not for one moment look away from this picture that drew him to itself.”⁵¹⁸ As the man grows up, the picture becomes his main point of reference for discerning the truth of Christianity.

The picture requires a specific attitude and approach. With this story, Kierkegaard establishes the distinction between the sacred and the profane.⁵¹⁹ The tension between divinity and violence in the painted picture opens the poetical possibility of the aesthetic profane that can be engaged in the hermeneutics of the picture. Following that, to first paint the picture and, then, to aesthetically approach it is considered by the man to be ungodly. Simply viewing such a painted picture of the picture, which represents a particular interpretation of what Christianity is, prevents the viewer from grasping what the picture communicates. The meaning of the picture is “becoming oneself the picture that resembled him.” Subsequently, the imitation of the holy, of the high and profound, also requires a *mimesis* of the violence and, in that sense, it entails both martyrdom—discussed in the previous chapter—and the problem of existential reduplication—to be analyzed in the next chapter.

Anti-Climacus presents a parallel story of a child exposed to a disturbing picture of “the Crucified One” in *Practice in Christianity*. The author inquires as to the effect of looking at “the abased one”⁵²⁰ and provides an account of a child who encounters the image of crucified Christ for the first time. The image of Christ has to be “t[old]...fairly well.”⁵²¹ To do so (to tell it well) one must offer the child a set of

⁵¹⁷ Two forms of mystery or *mysterium*, *mysterium fascinans* and *mysterium tremendum*, compose Rudolf Otto’s concept of religious experience, so called “numinous experience.” *Mysterium fascinans*, as the name suggests, causes in the subject fascination with the object and captures the subjects attention by its unique attractiveness. The *fascinans* joins the *tremendum*, which can be experienced in pleasure, excitement or in horror. It is an exceptional phenomenon to be found in the whole history of religion: see Rudolf Otto, “On Numinous Experience as *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans*,” in *Experience of the Sacred: Readings in the Phenomenology of Religion*, ed. by Sumner B. Twiss and Walter H. Conser, Jr., Hanover: University Press of New England 1992, pp. 77–85.

⁵¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 55 (SKS 11, 61).

⁵¹⁹ Rudolf Otto, “On Numinous Experience as *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans*,” p. 79. The sacred is what is set apart from what is ordinary in human everyday life. It is constituted by the contrast. Approaching the picture requires certain mental preparations, in contrast to spontaneous everyday action, which is the profane, non-religious mood of everyday experience.

⁵²⁰ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, p. 174 (SKS 12, 176).

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

pictures of exemplary figures, such as the victorious Napoleon and the noble William Tell, and include in this set the picture that “portrays one crucified.”⁵²² As the child expresses a lack of understanding of the picture, the *experimenter* has to accompany it with a narrative explaining the whereabouts of this picture. Anti-Climacus says: “Then you explain to the child that it is a cross and that to hang upon it means to be crucified, and that crucifixion in that country was the most painful death penalty, moreover, a disgraceful death penalty that was used only for the most flagrant criminals.”⁵²³

The effect of the picture is to leave the child unsettled and anxious over himself, his own parents, and the world he inhabits. The *experimenter*, on the one hand, constantly aggravates the story of the crucified one by adding contrasting features of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion, showing the innocence and love of the victim alongside the murderous and hating crowd. On the other hand, he continuously asks after the effect the whole procedure is having on the child. Having in mind and perpetually revitalizing his “childhood impression,”⁵²⁴ the child would go through a process of internal change. Initially, in passion the child would want to take revenge on those guilty of the crime; as an adolescent with the same kind of passion, the child would want to contend with “the whole world in which people would spit upon the Holy One;”⁵²⁵ as a mature and older person the child would want “to suffer approximately as he suffered in this world.”⁵²⁶ This image of the crucified Christ is an expression of the way “the fathers and teachers, who together with the apostles”⁵²⁷ perceived Christ; it is how they knew him and, as Anti-Climacus repeats after H.H.—which ties together the two images of the crucified Christ presented by H.H. and Anti-Climacus—“He must not be represented in any other way.”⁵²⁸

These two conceptions of “the image of the crucified Christ” stand in a critical relation to Lessing’s aesthetics of the image and representation. Whereas for Lessing the guiding task of aesthetics is to represent what is beautiful and harmonious, “the

⁵²² *Ibid.*, p. 175 (SKS 12, 177). In that sense, Kierkegaard once again recognizes the idea of *figura* as the foundation for his conception of mimetic models discussed in the previous chapter. Here Napoleon and Tell are morally worthy and admirable characters. The idea here is that of the three mimetic models; the child chooses the one which, first, puzzles and upsets, then builds a violent passion in the child, namely, Christ.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-8 (SKS 12, 179-80).

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178 (SKS 12, 179).

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 175 (SKS 12, 177).

image of the crucified Christ” is ugly and represents violence and chaos. Moreover, contrary to Lessing’s rendering of the limit and capacity of art to represent the idea and to his prioritizing of one artistic medium over another, “the image of the crucified Christ” is not reserved for one particular medium, but “consists of” various media. In fact, it is both a spoken picture and a visualized narrative.

Consequently, “the image of the crucified Christ,” understood as the synergy and cooperation of various media of art in the work of representing the idea, contests Lessing’s critique of *ekphrasis*, while Kierkegaard’s view of *ekphrasis* concentrates on the effect the image has on the recipient. Although it is a picture, it does not have one moment of appropriation, which Lessing sees as the role of a picture. Instead it is constantly being re-appropriated and re-understood by the recipient throughout her life. In its synergy with the spoken narrative, the effect of this type of image is spread out over time.

Although Kierkegaard indirectly critiques Lessing’s aesthetics, he also refers to him in a positive manner. Kierkegaard incorporates into his image of the crucified Christ Lessing’s theory of the role of the recipient in the process of the “production of the image.”⁵²⁹ According to Lessing, the receiver of the aesthetic production has to recreate in his own world the message conveyed by the artwork.⁵³⁰ We see this at work in Kierkegaard’s idea of the militant concept of the martyr presented over the course of his late writings, but we also see it in the child’s reaction to the picture in which the child, by staring at the picture of Crucified Christ, is himself “becoming...the picture that resembled him.”⁵³¹ In that sense, the picture creates or germinates another picture. In the process of understanding the picture of the crucified Christ, ultimately the child embarks on a process of representing in his own self the sufferings of Christ.

In spite of the fact that Kierkegaard indirectly criticized Lessing’s concept of aesthetic production as concerned with representing the beautiful, his evaluation does not dismiss Lessing’s position entirely. Kierkegaard does not disregard an implicit part of Lessing’s thought, according to which artistic production consists in

⁵²⁹ Lessing, *Laocoon*, pp. 119-25.

⁵³⁰ Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, pp. 188-9. In the footnote to that ‘thought,’ the authors already hint that in Lessing’s literary productions, the recipient of an artwork can in fact be the author reading their writing, a thought strongly present in Kierkegaard’s late works. In this regard see also the article about the formation of so-called empathetic reading among the German thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Robert S. Bledsoe, “Empathetic Reading and Identity Formation,” *Lessing Yearbook* 33, 2001, pp. 201-31.

⁵³¹ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 55 (SKS 11, 61).

representing or, to put it more vividly, making present the *idea*. This understanding of *mimesis* as representing the ideal falls under the category of *ekphrasis*. Following that reasoning, the picture of the Crucified Christ represents the ideal of Christ understood as the ultimate way Christ should be represented and comprehended.

B. “The ideal picture of being a Christian”

Another unique image Kierkegaard introduces in his writings is “the ideal picture of being a Christian.” Although it accords with a religiously-rendered mimetic model—as outlined in Chapter Two—the fact that “the ideal picture of being a Christian” is actually a *picture* already indicates its imagistic, and therefore aesthetic and communicative (in the sense of representation) dimensions. Taking this as a point of departure, I argue that there are two ekphrastic facets of “the ideal picture of being a Christian.” First, it represents a particular ideal in an analogous manner to “the image of the crucified Christ.” As I have discussed above, the latter represents the ideal of Christianity, and the former, following my consideration of a mimetic model in Chapter Two, is the representation of the ideal Christian. In that sense the picture makes present the structure of the ideal self and mediates between the represented ideal and the recipient in the form of the already-discussed “middle terms.”

Second, as I indicated in the previous chapter, “the ideal picture of being a Christian” can be understood as an example of *ekphrasis* through its dialectical relationship with another mimetic model, namely the negative model. Phrasing this in Hegelian terms, the negative model is the antithesis of “the ideal picture of being a Christian,” with which it remains in tension. To put it plainly, both models represent two sides of an imitative structure that is textually emplotted by Kierkegaard in his work. Their dialectical relationship is complementary and foregrounds the fundamental relationship between *being* and *becoming* a Christian. This can be observed in the fact that the negative model is actually an image, or a reflection of “the ideal picture of being a Christian” rendered according to a *via negativa*. The negative model becomes an image of the image (understood as “the ideal picture of being a Christian”), which is already an established representation of the Christian ideal. Consequently, both mimetic models can be rendered as a single mimetic model that structurally recaptures their difference.

The distinctiveness of “the ideal picture of being a Christian” compared with other pictures lies in the transformative power it has over the negative model in the existential sphere of that latter model. So “the ideal picture of being a Christian” can actually “work on” the negative model, in order to assist the one trying and striving to resemble the ideal to advance further in towards her goal. “The ideal picture of being a Christian” encompasses two realities: the ideal and the subjective. The ideal is of the transcendent and the subjective is of a particular individual. As already presented in Chapter Two, the individual can only appropriate the Christian ideal by first acknowledging herself in relation to the negative model. This propensity of “the ideal picture of being a Christian” fits with the already-discussed aspect of *ekphrasis* in Lessing’s rendering in the context of the image of the crucified Christ, according to which the receiver recreates in himself the information conveyed by the production of the artwork.

So far I have distinguished between two types of images as examples of *ekphrasis* in Kierkegaard. However, one can see that a much larger part of Kierkegaard’s production exhibits an *ekphrastic* structure; in fact Kierkegaard’s reader in their engagement with the text is thrown into a textual structure composed by images. On the one hand, one can determine *ekphrastic* relations between the given mimetic models: the ideal self, “the ideal picture of being a Christian,” and the negative model are mimetic and aesthetic. It seems that the ideal self is a certain textual representation of a particular ideality—the Christian ideal—and it finds visual representation in “the ideal picture of being a Christian,” which in turn has its negative (image) in the negative model. On the other hand, by breaking these concepts down we attain a multitude of images that to some extent represent the Christian ideal—like the single individual, the ideal Christian, the extraordinary, genius, the apostle, the martyr, the negative model, and others—and their role is to intensify and deepen the reception of the communicated message. As Kierkegaard puts it:

My task has continually been to provide the existential-corrective by poetically presenting the ideals and inciting people about the established order, with which I collaborate by criticizing all the false reformers and the opposition, who simply are evil—and whom only ideals can halt.⁵³²

⁵³² Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 1, p. 331, entry 708 (SKS 24, 212; NB 23:15).

Kierkegaard believes that a multitude of *ekphrastic* actions can increase the impact of the original idea represented through the mutually reinforcing synergy of various artistic media and that the composite of text and image is able to come alive and interact with the reader/viewer.

Does this reading of “the ideal picture of being a Christian” and “the image of Crucified Christ” from an aesthetic perspective agree with Kierkegaard? Would he endorse such a hermeneutics? An answer to that question is hinted at in his account of Plato’s criticism of “the poets” in the *Republic*. In a journal entry the Dane offers an interesting comment on the “how” of Plato’s expelling of “the poets” from the state, a remark that could unsettle the Greek philosopher. Kierkegaard says:

It is not strange that Plato in his *Republic* wants to have ‘the poets’ expelled from the state, frequently attacks ‘the poets’ in various ways, and yet actually was himself a poet, or a thinker who was predominantly poetic...Plato is the poet who wants to be rid of the ‘poet’...This aspect of Plato has been significant to me personally as well. I have always recognized that there is a poetic strain in me.⁵³³

Similar to the way Plato criticizes “the poets” in a poetic way, Kierkegaard’s presentation of the religious has an aesthetic (or poetic) component. Although the image Kierkegaard incorporates into his writings is a particular type of image that points beyond itself, beyond its imagistic dimension, it also exhibits a phenomenological side, which is aesthetic and observational. Kierkegaard’s deliberate use of “picture” as a means of communicating his ideas confirms that his authorship must be understood as a work of art; and, as he often repeats, he must be understood himself as a poet whose work operates within the realm of imagination—the subject of consideration in the final chapter of my dissertation. In that sense Kierkegaard’s engagement with *mimesis*, with regard to its representational dimension, is deeply aesthetic.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 527, entry 3328 (SKS 23, 187; NB17:35).

2. Fantastic *Mimesis*

In the previous section I identified the “picture of the crucified Christ” and “the ideal image of a Christian” as two unique examples of Kierkegaard’s reading of *mimesis* that link together the domains of religion and aesthetics. Drawing upon these examples, I have shown that Kierkegaard’s religious concepts ultimately cannot be divorced from their imagistic forms of presentation and, indeed, unless they are *directly* communicated, any form of re-presentation requires a form of aesthetic mediation. In that sense, “re-presentation” of religious ideals is deeply mimetic. Moreover, understood as instances of *ekphrasis*, these two images challenge Lessing’s aesthetic project by providing a synergic understanding of artistic representation. This demonstrates that Kierkegaard does not merely defy modern aesthetics, but offers a novel and decidedly progressive rendering of the representational function of art.

In sum, we have seen how ekphrastic expressions “re-present” one artifact in a new medium and how Kierkegaard entered into debates in his day on this topic. Now I will consider another mode of “re-presentation,” the Platonic discussion of the problem we find in his two modes of communication, namely, *eikastic* and *fantastic mimeses*. My intention in this section is to show that “the how” (or the *form*) of Kierkegaard’s communication is deeply mimetic in a representational sense. Such a reading goes beyond the traditional manner of addressing the notion of communication in his works which, on the one hand, concentrates on its moral and pedagogical breadth and, on the other, overlooks textual representation as a form of deliberately structured, and therefore value-laden communication. In short, my reading of Kierkegaard’s communication with his reader contributes an examination of its representational dimension.

My argument proceeds as follows. After presenting two kinds of *mimesis* from the *Sophist*—*eikastic* and *fantastic*—I argue that Kierkegaard engages both of them in his authorial strategies. I show that the means by which his authorship exercises communicative influence can be understood as *fantastic mimesis*, which aims at addressing a reader at a great distance from truth. This I predominantly identify in his method of extracting “the single individual” from “the crowd” through deception and in his existential project, both of which have a coercive and evaluative effect on the recipient.

A. *Eikastic* and *fantastic mimesis* and the reader at a distance.

Concentrating on the literary form of most of Plato's dialogues, one can distinguish two means of representation that influence their reception, *eikastic* and *fantastic mimeses*.⁵³⁴ Both kinds of *mimesis*⁵³⁵ are applied to communicate with the recipient "at a distance." In Plato's *Sophist*, two types of distance are addressed, physical (space) and intellectual (knowledge); the former type concerns the visual arts (painting and sculpture), the latter verbal *mimesis*. Moreover, two parties are involved in representational *mimesis*, the artist and the viewer, but it is especially in verbal *mimesis* that both parties influence the truthfulness of the artwork, as they can both be "distant from the truth." An ignorant viewer can perceive a genuine artwork as false but, at the same time, "a wise member of the audience could correctly assess the falsehood of a work created by an ignorant artist," as Andrea Nightingale explains in her "Distant Views: 'Realistic' and 'Fantastic' Mimesis in Plato."⁵³⁶

In his communication with his readers/viewers, Plato utilizes *eikastic* (realistic) and *fantastic* types of *mimesis* both dually and in a dialectical manner. On the one hand, realistic and *fantastic mimeses* are engaged in presenting truth to the audience of his dialogues, often "offer[ing] a visual aid that attempts to portray truths that are distant from the unphilosophical viewer, and from an earthly perspective, virtually impossible to see."⁵³⁷ Here, the spectators are at various distances from truth; some of them are closer and some are farther from truth, therefore different means of representations are required for each.

To raise his argument against the sophists, the Eleatic Stranger first builds a pejorative image of them in the dialogue when he convinces Theaetetus that they are not wise, but want to be perceived as so they were. Both the Stranger and Theaetetus agree that sophists in their training prepare their pupils to discuss every subject possible, but, as they both admit, "it is [not] possible for any human being to know

⁵³⁴ Andrea Nightingale "Distant Views: 'Realistic' and 'Fantastic' Mimesis in Plato, *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 227.

⁵³⁵ This understanding of the concept is rendered in its representational sense and does not necessarily have any axiological implications. Compare this with the two types of imitation, 'imitation with knowledge' and 'versatile imitation,' in Elizabeth Belfiore, "A Theory of Imitation in Plato's *Republic*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, vol. 114, 1984, pp. 121-46, and 'the non-imitative imitation' and 'the imitative imitation' in J. Tate's "'Imitation' in Plato's *Republic*," pp. 16-33, which I discussed in Chapter Two.

⁵³⁶ Nightingale, "Distant Views," p. 228.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 227-8.

everything.”⁵³⁸ Although they are ignorant, sophists can make youngsters believe that they actually know everything there is to know.⁵³⁹ They place the utmost importance on the appearance they generate of themselves, not on the knowledge they possess.⁵⁴⁰ Sophists do not have the knowledge they claim to have. Moreover, what is at stake is merely an opinion that their students have about them (their sophist teachers) as possessing that knowledge.⁵⁴¹ As a consequence, both the teachers and the students are in the wrong.

During this discussion Plato’s Stranger familiarizes the audience of the dialogue with two interrelated issues. First, the Stranger introduces two types of imitation. Second, he indirectly influences the audience of the dialogue to sympathize with him by juxtaposing a certain appearance of himself with that of the sophists; as we will see later in this chapter, this method of pointing out “similarity, example and division”⁵⁴² will be appropriated by Kierkegaard in his presentation of the ideal self in his works. Here, the Stranger is understood as ignorant but pursuing true knowledge, by contrast with the sophists, who care not about truth, rather mere appearances of truth and their reception, and as a consequence complacently misguide and misinform their recipients.⁵⁴³ The Stranger describes a sophist as a shady character who engages in dishonest business and has fraudulent reasons to hide in “some lurking place among the subdivisions of this art of imitation,”⁵⁴⁴ and thus has to be “hunted down” and exposed.

In order to sharpen his definition of a sophist, the Stranger specifies what kind of imitator he is. He distinguishes two types of *mimesis*: “making of likenesses and making of semblances.”⁵⁴⁵ The first one “consists in creating a copy that conforms to the proportions of the original in all three dimensions and giving moreover the proper

⁵³⁸ Plato, *Sophist*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, transl. by F. M. Cornford, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1691, 233a; occasionally I will use the translation from *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 2, transl. by Paul Shorey: London-New York: Heinemann and G.P. Putnam’s Sons 1921.

⁵³⁹ Plato, *Sophist*, 233b.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 233c. The sophists care to “appear to their pupils to be wise on all subjects... Although they are not really wise, for that we saw, is impossible.”

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴² See in this regard: Melissa S. Lane, *Method and Politics in Plato’s Statesman*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998.

⁵⁴³ See also: Plato, *Republic*, 603a-b.

⁵⁴⁴ Plato, *Sophist*, 235c; “try to take cover in any of the various sections of the imitative art” in Fowler’s translation.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 236c.

color to every part.”⁵⁴⁶ Such an artist presents things in a realistic way and with actual proportions; the kind of *mimesis* operative here appeals to likeness and resemblance. The other kind of *mimesis* represents appearance or semblance and is therefore called *fantastic*. Such an artist has to deal not with proportions but perspective, because her artwork is of a large scale.⁵⁴⁷ By employing in her production artistic “techniques like ‘foreshortening,’”⁵⁴⁸ which influence proportions, the artist “leaving the truth to take care of itself...put into the images [he] make[s], not the real proportions, but those that will appear beautiful.”⁵⁴⁹

On the one hand, we see here that the maker of semblances is concerned with the way artistic representations appear, rather than with their structural proportions. Such a characterization immediately implies an evaluative approach to this kind of *mimesis* as the imitator seems to intentionally overlook the essential aspects of that which he makes present. On the other hand, the two types of *mimesis* aim to present objects they represent from different perspectives: the realistic approach aims at presenting relatively small objects viewed from a short distance, whereas *fantastic mimesis* aims at giving large-scale presentations of distant objects.⁵⁵⁰ Plato does not give one definitive judgment over of *fantastic mimesis*. Rather, he warns the reader that the imitator may manipulate both the viewer and the original in her representation by not acknowledging the fact that proportions are distorted, and by not informing the viewer who is “at a distance” from truth about the reasons for and grounds of the whole procedure of *fantastic mimesis*. This warning is obviously directed to sophists who are already diagnosed with dishonesty.

In the final part of the dialogue the Stranger introduces further distinctions. This time focusing on *fantastic mimesis*, he points out two groups of *fantastic* art: it is either produced by tools/instruments or by people who make themselves into tools/instruments.⁵⁵¹ Plato divides the latter, which he calls “mimetic,”⁵⁵² into two

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 235d-e.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 235e-236a.

⁵⁴⁸ Nightingale, “Distant Views,” p. 229.

⁵⁴⁹ Plato, *Sophist*, 236a.

⁵⁵⁰ Nightingale claims that realistic *mimesis* suits small objects and their small representations, and that *fantastic mimesis* suits large objects and their large representations. I claim that what is at stake here is not whether a small or large object is represented but rather the *scale* of representation. See Nightingale, “Distant Views,” p. 230.

⁵⁵¹ Plato, *Sophist*, 267a.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 267a. Following Fowler’s translation: “When anyone, by employing his own person as his instrument, makes his own figure or voice seem similar to yours, that kind of *fantastic* art is called mimetic.”⁵⁵²; Cornford’s translations seems evaluative: “When someone uses his own person or

further subgroups by referring to two types of imitators, those with knowledge of what they imitate and those without it; they are “scientific imitation” and “opinion-imitation” respectively.⁵⁵³ Within the latter (“opinion-imitation”) there are “simple-minded” imitators who “imagine what [they] believe in knowledge”⁵⁵⁴ and “dissembling imitators” who “strongly suspect and fear that they are ignorant of the things which they pretend before the public to know”⁵⁵⁵ but have no second thoughts about it. Plato also discerns two subclasses of dissembling imitators: those who publicly dissemble or simulate appearance in long speeches and those who, in short and private speeches, force their interlocutors to contradict themselves. The former is a demagogue; the latter, who is “a mimic of the wise man...is the real and genuine Sophist.”⁵⁵⁶

This subdivision recalls what Plato stated earlier in the *Republic*, where the negative imitator does not have true knowledge of the things he imitates and is therefore guided only by opinions and appearances. Understood here as a sophist, the negative imitator has only human and earthly means at his disposal, contrary to the true philosopher who uses the divine paradigm. However, what has been added to that description is the consciously volitional dimension of the false philosopher, who knows he is in the wrong but is complacent about it. Moreover, what Plato stresses in his expositions of *mimesis* in both the *Republic* and the *Sophist* forms the foundation for his criticism of *mimesis* that pertains to the relation between the imitator and his recipients: the two types of distance—of space and knowledge—determine to a great extent whether (the engagement of) *mimesis* is genuine or not.

B. Kierkegaard and the reader at a distance.

It comes as no surprise that Kierkegaard’s reader is at a distance from truth.⁵⁵⁷ This holds even if we perceive Kierkegaard as the (intended) reader of his own works,

voice to counterfeit your traits of speech, the proper name for creating such a semblance is, I take it, mimicry.”

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 267-bd. Following Fowler’s translation; Cornford’s terms are respectively “mimicry by acquaintance” and “conceit mimicry.”

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 268a.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 268a. Following Fowler’s translation.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 268c.

⁵⁵⁷ It also comes as no surprise that Kierkegaard is familiar with both types of distance and the problem of being too close to an object to see it properly. See for example: Kierkegaard, *Either-Or I*, 315-6: “And if a person were unable to possess an image in recollection at the very moment of presence,

something he both suggests and acknowledges throughout his writings.⁵⁵⁸ To communicate with his reader at distance, the Dane uses various strategies, such as pseudonymous authorship, indirect communication, satire, irony and deception. These means, often overlapping at various points, are employed to reach the readers at different distances from truth.

Discussing his authorship—one of the central concerns in the following chapter—Kierkegaard clearly indicates that his aesthetic works are supposed to extract “the single individual” from the crowd by deceiving one into truth. This is part of his theory of indirect communication or “communication in reflection,” which is set against the direct communication of truth. Elaborating what he calls “the movement of the authorship,” the Dane writes: “The direct way begins with individuals, a few readers....”⁵⁵⁹ However, to arrive at that point, the author must first start with communicating in an indirect manner, which means “to gather a large number, to acquire an abstraction: the public.”⁵⁶⁰ At first, Kierkegaard appeals to the crowd. He is not interested in it as such, but rather in the individuals who form the crowd and who can be separated from it. In the crowd, individuals are not real individuals, rather they behave *like* the crowd and share a common identity. Thus, by publishing *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard embarked on his task of arousing confusion and provoking commotion in the public, thereby disintegrating it in service of his sole aim of separating individuals. He describes this tactic as “shake[ing] off ‘the crowd’ in order to get hold of ‘the single individual.’”⁵⁶¹

Either/Or did not ultimately represent Kierkegaard’s thought, rather it was designed to catch the attention of the public; as we are aware from the number of copies sold in Denmark at the time, the undertaking was successful.⁵⁶² It is important to note that the aesthetic works address the reader who is not yet a single individual and cannot be reached through direct communication. This is so because, in a general

he must ever wish to be at a distance from beauty, not so close that the mortal eyes cannot see the beauty of that which he holds in his embrace and which the external eyes have lost, which he, to be sure, can regain for the external vision by distancing himself from it, but which he can, in fact, have before the eye of his soul when he cannot see the object because it is too close to him, when lips are clinging to lips... How beautiful she is!”

⁵⁵⁸ See for example Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 12 (SKS 13, 19).

⁵⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 9 (SKS 13, 15). The whole sentence, which at first may seem confusing goes as follows: “The direct way begins with individuals, a few readers, and the task or the movement is to gather a large number, to acquire an abstraction: the public.”

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶² See an account of this in Joakim Garff, “Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography,” transl. by Bruce H. Kirmmse, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 2007, pp. 508-19.

respect, the subject matter of these aesthetic works is not human spirit in the eminent sense, rather that which forms a backdrop for a discussion of the religious dimension of human being in later, non-aesthetic works.

In his early production Kierkegaard was “deceiving inversely on the large scale...using [his] familiarity with people and their weaknesses and their obtusities...to annihilate [himself], to weaken the impression of [himself].”⁵⁶³ In a section from *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, with the telling title “All the Esthetic Writing Seen in the Totality of the Writings Is a Deception, but Understood in a Singular Way,” Kierkegaard reiterates that his aesthetic production is deceptive and that such a reading of these works considers “the deeper significance of *pseudonymity*.”⁵⁶⁴ Pointing to the Socratic origins of deception into truth, Kierkegaard warns us against “being deceived by the word *deception*,”⁵⁶⁵ as it denotes a dialectical concept.

To explain deception he distinguishes between two types of ignorance—a distinction that resembles Plato’s discernment of two types of distance from truth. According to Kierkegaard we should picture two types of ignorant people. The one who is under illusion must be first assisted with the means to remove that illusion.⁵⁶⁶ The other one, who lacks knowledge but is not under any illusion, “is like a vessel that must be filled,”⁵⁶⁷ and hence is closer to truth than the former. Having said that, the one under illusion must be first deceived and tricked, which means that for the sake of truth she must be initially exposed to a certain untruth or, what is more likely, to a distorted image of truth.

To engage an individual with important issues, Socrates often discussed trivialities. The interlocutor was deceived into thinking that she is participating in a casual conversation about various mundane things, whereas the dialogue actually concerned issues ranging from human subjectivity and agency to social and ethical values. Kierkegaard models this reasoning on Plato’s dialogical and maieutic method of communication. He says that “one does not begin in this way: It is Christianity that I am proclaiming, and you are living in purely esthetic categories. No, one begins this

⁵⁶³ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 58 (SKS 16, 39).

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53 (SKS 16, 35).

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-7 (SKS 16, 24-9).

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54 (SKS 16, 35).

way: Let us talk about the esthetic.”⁵⁶⁸ It is evident that, although the subject of discussion is the aesthetic, it is in fact not the aim of the conversation to debate it—the ultimate goal is “to arrive at the religious.”⁵⁶⁹

Interestingly, these forms of deception have an existential and performative dimension in Kierkegaard, as they were enacted in the life of the Danish philosopher, not just written down as part of his authorship.⁵⁷⁰ As Kierkegaard elucidates in his account of the relation between his life and his aesthetic production in “Personal Existing in Relation to the Esthetic Writing,” his work was composed in constant reference to his own life. In other words, Kierkegaard’s life contributed to or complemented the message embedded in his writings. Commenting on his life during the period of writing *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard acknowledges that he performed deception by creating appearances of a life he was actually not living. He confesses that “the crowd always falls into the trap of appearances. It does not even take very much time to manage to be seen every day if only one ingeniously uses the time properly—that is, walks to and fro in the same but the most frequented place in the city.”⁵⁷¹ Another account of his enactment of untrue images of himself can be found in his famous “five-minute” visits to the theatre witnessed by Giodvad. The intellectual elite of Copenhagen perceived Kierkegaard, as he believed, as “a street-corner loafer, an idler, a *flâneur*, a frivolous bird, a good, perhaps even brilliant pate, witty, etc.—but completely lacked ‘earnestness.’”⁵⁷² Here, Kierkegaard’s work consisted in generating false representations of himself and distributing misleading appearances—both conveyed through the medium of performance.⁵⁷³ Hence, for Kierkegaard, deception is a communicative strategy and a way to interact with particularly defined addressees.

Another construction used to address the reader at a distance is Kierkegaard’s existential project. Read in parallel with Kierkegaard’s signed, pseudonymous and anonymous production, and coupled with his extensive journal entries, the stages of existence presented by a plurality of voices address different readers depending on

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63 (SKS 16, 44). “Thereafter the transition to the second part is made, the series of exclusively religious books. That may personal existing had to be conformed to this, or that I had to try to give my contemporaries another impression of my personal existing, I perceived at once.”

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59 (SKS 16, 40).

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 61 (SKS 16, 42).

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 82 (SKS 16, 60f). “So I went out into life—initiated into every possible enjoyment of life yet never actually enjoying it...striving to produce the appearances that I was enjoying it...”

their existential intensity. Kierkegaard's complex authorship, on the one hand, allows him to distance himself from different perspectives presented in his works and, on the other hand, "confronts the reader with different personalities and figures who all espouse different views,"⁵⁷⁴ not just "unilaterally presented clear-cut doctrines and theses."⁵⁷⁵ These personalities and figures are characterized by different intensities of the self or degrees of consciousness. Kierkegaard's three stages of life, which I will not discuss in this study extensively, have a diverse range of essential features that speak to different readers at different removes from truth.

We find an example of the way Kierkegaard's existential project addresses readers at different distances from truth in Anti-Climacus' deliberation on the relation between despair and ignorance in *The Sickness Unto Death*. At face value, people are not aware of being in despair, however, this does not change the fact that they are. Indeed, not knowing that one is in despair entails that one is "furthest from being conscious of himself as spirit."⁵⁷⁶ Being "removed" from knowing oneself as spirit actually signifies a much greater distance from truth than consciousness of one's despair. The author of the book says:

Compared with the person who is conscious of his despair, the despairing individual who is ignorant of his despair is simply a negativity further away from the truth and deliverance. Despair itself is a negativity; ignorance of it, a new negativity. However, to reach the truth, one must go through every negativity....⁵⁷⁷

The gradation in self-consciousness that determines people's distance from truth initially designates a human criterion ("first came ignorance of having an eternal self...then a knowledge of having a self in which there is something eternal"⁵⁷⁸), something that was both implicitly and explicitly implied in other pseudonymous works. Anti-Climacus takes this further and articulates it in terms of a divine criterion, that is, he transposes the self into a relation with God.

⁵⁷⁴ Katalin Nun and Jon Stewart, "Preface" to *Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 17, ed. by Katalin Nun and Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2015, p. xi.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, p. 44 (SKS 11, 159).

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79 (SKS 11, 193).

Despair is lined up with the theological concept of sin and, again, two types of distance are identified: “Sin itself is severance from the good, but despair over sin is the second severance.”⁵⁷⁹ To summarize briefly, what we learn from Anti-Climacus is that despair is a condition common to all people (despair is “universal”), affecting both those who are ignorant of the fact that they are in despair and those who have the highest intensity of despair (“the greater the degree of consciousness, the more intensive the despair”⁵⁸⁰). This difference in the intensity of despair locates people at varying distances from truth. Thus various communicative measures are required. Kierkegaard puts these into practice with his concept of the existential spheres—the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious life views—which are exemplified by the authorial voices and characters from his entire corpus.

3. The ideal self and originality

In this section I will present a mimetic analysis of a seemingly “non-mimetic” essay by H.H., “The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle.” While it seems as though the work is primarily concerned with the theological subject of revelation, deconstructing it from the perspective of *mimesis* demonstrates its deeply mimetic-representational dimension, which we primarily find in Kierkegaard’s presentation of the ideal self. I argue that the essay evaluates *mimesis* in line with Plato’s discussion of the subject from the *Sophist*. In that sense it appropriates the method of discernment and juxtaposition used by Plato in his judgment on of the representational dimensions of the concept in question. Moreover, “The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle” is a swift mimetic reformulation and appropriation of, and contribution to, the discussion of originality and “the difference between a genius and talent” among Kierkegaard’s early and late contemporaries.

Kierkegaard’s tacit introduction of the ideal self is embedded in his discussion of originality as related to three interconnected issues: the problem of authority, the status of genius, and human autonomy. First, in order to approach the issue of originality in relation to authority he considers the case of the defrocked bishop, Adolph Adler, and his claims about received revelation and apostleship.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109 (SKS 11, 221).

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42 (SKS 11, 157).

Second, he examines the status of an apostle as the truly extraordinary figure against the backdrop of the mimetic discussion of the difference between a genius and talent led by his early and late contemporaries in his pseudonymous “The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle.” The mode of discernment in the essay imitates the way Plato distinguishes in the *Sophist* between the true philosopher and the sophist, where the latter merely pretends to be the former. Lastly, Kierkegaard uses his appraisal of genius as “not” the true extraordinary in “the eminent sense” as a criticism of the notion of absolute human autonomy.

My consideration of the problem of originality corresponds with Rasmussen’s argument in *Between Irony and Witness* that Kierkegaard’s imitation is in many respects a response to the German Romantics’ rendering of the concept as “originality.” The German Romantics criticized forms of art that aim to represent reality. The true imitator does not appeal to any particular model, but rather creates out of herself, not representing but constructing a “new world” and “new subject.”⁵⁸¹ Rasmussen indicates that Kierkegaard offers a critical correction to the Romantic mode of “living poetically” by transforming it into “existing before God” and creating within God’s creation.⁵⁸² As I will show, this reading resonates with my examination of Kierkegaard’s assessment of modern *mimesis*. Nonetheless, in order to show the full scale of the Dane’s appraisal of the problem in question, and also to shed more light on his understanding of the human self as essentially mimetic—as will be discussed in the following chapters—I will go back to the roots of the modern outlook on *mimesis*.

A. *Mimesis* and the ancients and the moderns

In his brief but highly informative account of the history of *mimesis*, Matthew Potolsky argues that the redefinition of *mimesis* from its initial sense of *imitatio* to *originality* can be traced to the Roman Empire. As Horace notes, the Romans conquered the Greeks militarily, but in turn they were conquered by Greek culture. The great poet thus suggests: “Study Greek models day and night.”⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness*, p. 123.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.* 109.

⁵⁸³ Following Potolsky, *Mimesis*, p. 52.

Indeed, contemporary classical literary genres evolved through imitation of those forms of written expression first developed and practiced by Roman artists. Potolsky explains the phenomenon of *imitatio*:

This process was often described as *translatio studii*: the carrying over of learning from one culture to another. The Romans laid claim to Greek tradition by imitating Greek art, and European writers in the Renaissance asserted a continuity with classical antiquity by imitating the Romans...Imitation makes the original an original, renders it a 'classic' and a model for further imitation.⁵⁸⁴

What stands out in such an interpretation is that to imitate is not simply to copy inherited forms and works of art, but also to change, rewrite and parody it. A work of parody provokes laughter because it ensures that the object of parody (another work) is discernable to the audience; as a work it is both new and old.⁵⁸⁵ The Roman poets incorporated Greek art into their culture, but it was not a slavish assimilation. Potolsky illustrates this with the example of Horace's consideration of Pindar's poetry. Here, Icarus' fatal imitation of birds is set against the work of bees, which produce honey by transforming nature. Lastly, Potolsky addresses Seneca's reading of imitation as "both resembl[ing] and differ[ing] from its sources"—an apt example of which is a child resembling its parents.⁵⁸⁶

In the Renaissance, imitating and differing from the classical models was an ideal and necessary means to marry the Gospel with pagan Western heritage. The Christian message was seen as a clear advancement upon the religious and ethical views of the Greek and Roman models. By standing on the shoulders of giants the artists of the Renaissance saw farther and better: "The imitation of the ancients becomes an *imitatio* Christi, an imitation of Christ."⁵⁸⁷

Additionally, the understanding of poetry in the Renaissance was significantly close to the late Roman consideration of *mimesis*. Renaissance artists therefore did not consider their role to consist merely in representing or mirroring nature, but rather to

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁵⁸⁵ I will not analyze Kierkegaard's satire and parody, and comic and humor as forms of imitation; although such an analysis would be required to address the entire scope of the problem across his authorship.

⁵⁸⁶ Potolsky, *Mimesis*, pp. 57-8.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

reach “beyond what nature itself provides.”⁵⁸⁸ Such poetry does not inform or teach directly, as in Plato; following Aristotle, it “improves upon human nature” by supplying perfected images of nature and the human.⁵⁸⁹ By the end of the eighteenth century, *mimesis* inevitably became the subject matter of the famous debate over authority: the so-called *Querelle des Anciens et des Moderns* (Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns), which was most fervent in seventeenth-century France.⁵⁹⁰

The fundamental concern of the *Querelle* was the question of the perception of history. Artists, philosophers and professional academicians engaged with the question of how to interpret the advancement of modern science in relation to the knowledge of the ancients. If it was accepted that studying the ideals of natural sciences formulated by the ancients was a decline in relation to modern discoveries, the artistic ideals of the Greek and especially Roman artists appeared to be questionable. The moderns argued that artists should not adhere to classical rules and standards of artistic production, but instead go beyond them and establish their own criteria: “The primary criterion of literary quality gradually shifts from a concern with whether roles are being followed or broken to a *judgement of taste*.”⁵⁹¹ An interesting though indirect response to such a formulation is given by two fundamental figures to Kierkegaard, Descartes and Kant. Descartes, directly influenced by the *Querelle*, , rejects the authority of the ancients; he seeks it in his own self and finds it on the path of doubt. To be a creative human being one must listen only to one’s own reason, thus to follow authority amounts to an abandonment of reason.⁵⁹² Kierkegaard views Descartes as the exemplar of modern philosophy, which according to the Dane “begins in [absolute] doubt.”⁵⁹³

Kant’s progression from the critical thought of Descartes can be found in his *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, where the Prussian philosopher develops the idea of genius.⁵⁹⁴ Although genius is a product of nature, its action transcends nature.⁵⁹⁵ In its

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁰ For the sake of space, I will briefly point to the aspects of the debate that are directly relevant to this investigation, without attempting to provide a comprehensive account. For such an account see Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, pp. 107-19.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁵⁹² Potolsky, *Mimesis*, p. 66.

⁵⁹³ See Gianni Paganini, “The Quarrel Over Ancient and Modern Scepticism: Some Reflections On Descartes and His Context,” *The Legacies of Richard Popkin*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin, Dordrecht: Springer 2008, p. 173.

⁵⁹⁴ For a comprehensive account of genius in Kant’s third critique, but also for a broader comprehensive account of the subject of genius as such, see Paul W. Bruno, *Kant’s Concept of*

activity, genius does not adhere to any rules, because its production is original. Originality cannot be imitated; hence genius cannot be imitated by genius.⁵⁹⁶ The genius puts new *spirit* or *soul* into an artwork, by expressing at once the rational idea and its proper communicative form,⁵⁹⁷ although finding the form requires talent.⁵⁹⁸ Kant famously states: “Everyone agrees that genius is entirely opposed to *the spirit of imitation*.”⁵⁹⁹ Imitation of any model is in fact, aping.⁶⁰⁰

Reflection upon genius, especially in reference to talent, occupied a central place in modern aesthetic debates; hence the famous discussion of the difference between genius and talent.⁶⁰¹ Among those discussing the subject were Lessing, Schelling, Hegel and Kierkegaard.⁶⁰² Lessing first associated genius with Shakespeare

Genius: Its Origin and Function in the Third Critique, London and New York: Continuum 2010, especially chapter “Origins of Genius,” pp. 9-57.

⁵⁹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, transl. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 186. “Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art.”

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.* “That genius 1) is a talent for producing that for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition of skill for that which can be learned in accordance with some rule, consequently that originality must be its primary characteristic.”

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-6 (the whole §49); See also “Editor’s Introduction,” p. xxxiii.

⁵⁹⁸ Jennifer A. Bates, *Hegel’s Theory of Imagination*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2004, p. 139.

⁵⁹⁹ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 187.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 196. Although it is not critical to this study, it is important to have in mind that not all kinds of imitation are entirely ruled out in relation to genius for Kant. In fact he distinguishes between copying [*Nachmachung*], aping [*Nachäffung*], imitation [*Nachahmung*], and emulation or following [*Nachfolge*], where the last type of imitation is allowed between genius and genius. See *Ibid.*, pp. 195-6: “[G]enius is the exemplary originality of the natural endowment of a subject for the free use of his cognitive faculties. In this way the product of a genius...is an example, not for imitation [*Nachahmung*] (for then that which is genius in it and constitutes the spirit of the work would be lost), but for emulation [*Nachfolge*] by another genius, who is thereby awakened to the feeling of his own originality, to exercise freedom from coercion in his art in such a way that the latter thereby itself acquires a new rule, by which the talent shows itself as exemplary. But since the genius is a favorite of nature...his example for other good minds gives rise to a school, i.e., a methodical instruction in accordance with rules...and for these beautiful art is to that extent imitation, to which nature gave the rule through a genius. But this imitation [*Nachahmung*] becomes aping [*Nachäffung*] if the student copies everything, even down to that which the genius had to leave in, as a deformity, only because it could not easily have been removed without weakening the idea.” A more comprehensive account of this complex problem see: Martin Gammon, “‘Exemplary Originality’: Kant on Genius and Imitation,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 35, no. 4, 1997, pp. 563-92.

⁶⁰¹ For an overview of the discussion see: Reino Virtanen, “On the Dichotomy between Genius and Talent,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1981, pp. 69-90.

⁶⁰² The discussion of genius in Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous “Letter to the Reader” mostly addresses the ideas discussed in “all the German books.” See for example the footnote on Kierkegaard, *Stages on Lives Way*, p. 483 (SKS 6, 445). “An immediate genius can become a poet, artist, mathematician, etc., but a thinking person must, after all, know his relationship to the human existence lest he, despite all the German books, become a monstrosity (with the help of the pure being, which is an unthing).”

(and Goethe with some reservations⁶⁰³) who went beyond the confines of ancient drama.⁶⁰⁴ For Lessing a genius is “a born critic” who, far from disregarding all principles,⁶⁰⁵ “has the proof of all rules within himself,”⁶⁰⁶ as he is the one “who can produce out of himself, out of his own feelings,”⁶⁰⁷ and “creates a world which is also purposeful and coherent.”⁶⁰⁸ Lessing upholds the “rationalist” dimension of aesthetics, which is clear from his statement: “Who reasons correctly also invents.”⁶⁰⁹

Schelling’s take on genius, although based on Kant’s, adds a new dimension to the subject. He unites thought and nature in the concept of genius by calling the former conscious and the latter unconscious: “Now again if art comes about through two activities totally distinct from one another, genius is neither one nor the other, but that which presides over both.”⁶¹⁰ However, genius is primarily expressed in the arts,⁶¹¹ and the product generated by genius links the determinacy of nature with the freedom of human action.⁶¹² Understood in this way, genius resolves the perennial contradiction in human being between his conscious and unconscious nature, where

⁶⁰³ René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism 1750-1950*, vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981, p. 157.

⁶⁰⁴ Lilian R. Furst, “Shakespeare and the Formation of Romantic Drama in Germany and France,” *Romantic Drama*, ed. by Gerald Ernest and Paul Gillespie, John Benjamins Publishing, Amsterdam and Philadelphia 1994, p.12. “In Germany, the association of Shakespeare and “Genie” was first made by Lessing in the seventeenth *Literaturbrief* in 1769. Thereafter, it was a pivotal concept of every single discussion without exception: Wieland, Gerstenberg, Herder, Lenz, and Goethe...all capped their panegyric of Shakespeare with this magic and mysterious word.” Moreover, Kierkegaard himself participates in that discussion, showing that although Shakespeare is a genius, nevertheless, in his art he cannot grasp the ideal of the religious. Kierkegaard, *Stages on Lives Way*, p. 454 (SKS 6, 419): “On a specific point, one may have a doubt, another opinion, and yet agree on the one opinion that has been the opinion of one and two and three centuries—that Shakespeare stands unrivaled, despite the progress the world will make, that one can always learn from him, and the more one reads him, the more one learns.”

⁶⁰⁵ Jane Kneller, *Kant and the Power of Imagination*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009, p. 41.

⁶⁰⁶ Gotthold E. Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, No. 34, Werke 4, 149; translation following Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism 1750-1950*, p. 170.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 96, Werke 4, 422; translation following Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism 1750-1950*, p. 170.

⁶⁰⁸ Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism 1750-1950*, p. 170.

⁶⁰⁹ Kneller, *Kant and the Power of Imagination*, pp. 41-2.

⁶¹⁰ Friedrich, W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, transl. by Peter Heath, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia 1997, p. 223.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 222. “The product we postulate is none other than the product of genius, or, since genius is possible only in the arts, the product of art.”

⁶¹² Paul Guyer, “Knowledge and Pleasure in the Aesthetics of Schelling,” *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays*, ed. by Lara Ostarić, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014, p. 82. “A work of artistic genius is indisputably a product of human thought and human intentional action, yet at the same time it exceeds the conscious intentions of the artist in a way that must be attributed to nature, but to nature working with and through the conscious thoughts of the artist to determine the complete form, matter and content of the object, and thus to unconscious as well as conscious thought.”

the unconscious signifies both freedom and talent.⁶¹³ In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard distances himself from Schelling's view in which the work of genius is expressed in both action and the musical arts; for Kierkegaard the latter belongs to aesthetics, whereas action is a domain of ethics.⁶¹⁴

For Kant, genius represents nature and is "determined" in an unconscious way, while for Schelling, genius represents both the conscious and unconscious and is less determined in its action. For Hegel, genius is determined by the rationality of Spirit it expresses and as such is rooted not in nature, but in the objectivity of thought. According to Schelling, genius is more than talent,⁶¹⁵ for Hegel the difference is "abolished," they are both "natural endowments" that need to be "schooled." True art needs genius as much as it needs talent; it requires reflection for its expression not just as a mere means of presentation.⁶¹⁶ As the capacity to think is present in every human being, in Hegel the categories of genius and talent eventually become dispensable.

B. Between a genius and an apostle

As demonstrated above, the modern criticism of *mimesis* led from the rejection of a mimetic model to the elevation of genius, and ultimately to its annihilation. For Kierkegaard, the age of distinction comes to an end, especially with Hegel.⁶¹⁷ By endorsing Hegel's system, we annul the difference between transcendence and immanence and as well as the difference between a genius and an ordinary person. The idea that everyone and no one is a genius, which might be the radical conclusion of Hegel's philosophy, stands in contradiction with how Kierkegaard and the German Romantics perceived genius.

And yet this does not mean that their positions were identical. Indeed, Hegel himself is not the only guilty party here for the Danish thinker. Thus Kierkegaard's pseudonymous "The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle" emerges as a

⁶¹³ Bates, *Hegel's Theory of Imagination*, p. 139.

⁶¹⁴ David R. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, p. 150.

⁶¹⁵ Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, p. 228. "Genius is thus marked off from everything that consists in mere talent or skill by the fact that through it a contradiction is resolved, which is soluble absolutely and otherwise by nothing else." See also: Frederick Burwick, *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflection*, University Park: Penn State Press 2001, p. 83.

⁶¹⁶ Bates, *Hegel's Theory of Imagination*, p. 140-1. "For Hegel, Kant's genius, the producer of aesthetic ideas, is Spirit reflecting itself in historical, concrete *Vorstellungen*. Genius is located in the movement of a merely subjective soul...It is reflection, not genius, that is essential to the science of experience."

⁶¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p. 3 (SKS 4, 310).

criticism, based on a reading of the Gospel, of both Hegel's account of the mediocre self and the Romantic elevation of the extraordinary self. Expressed in its title, the essay's main idea is there is a real qualitative difference only between an apostle and other people. Hence, the difference between a genius and ordinary people is not qualitative in the absolute sense, which would follow from the Romantic appraisal of the problem. Nevertheless, it does not mean that there is "no difference" between them at all, as in Hegel.

As I will show, Kierkegaard makes his point by modeling his presentation of the ideal self on the *Sophist*. He believes that his pseudonymous work, "The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle," exposes the Romantic idea of genius as in fact not the true extraordinary, in a similar manner to Plato's unmasking the Sophist as an imposter of the true philosopher. In this sense, the essay imitates Plato's "the difference between the Sophist and the true philosopher" in the *Sophist*. Moreover, Kierkegaard's reference to the apostle's divine authority corresponds with the philosopher's concern for the divine, rather than their skill or craftsmanship.

Lastly, Kierkegaard's presentation of an apostle resembles Plato's presentation of the true philosopher in that both thinkers present the figures in comparison with (or against) other characters. At stake is the representational dimension of Kierkegaard's presentation of the ideal self that is not value-neutral, as it is paired with his criticism of the role and status of originality and genius among his contemporaries. In that sense, it corresponds with Plato's presentation of the ideal self—disguised in the form of the true philosopher—within his criticism of sophists.

The focus of the analysis in "The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle" is the Apostle Paul. This New Testament figure is juxtaposed with Plato and Shakespeare. Paul embodies the classical understanding of human production as craftsmanship and, in reference to Plato, we would have to examine Paul's craftsmanship and ask about the ingeniousness of his trade as a tent maker. This being posited in a humorous way received an ironic response: "and as a tapestry maker, well, I must say that I do not know how high he can rank in this regard."⁶¹⁸ Kierkegaard's reference to Shakespeare—who by breaking with the classical model of theatre was considered to be the iconic figure of genius of the period—reveals his evaluation of the modern understanding of *mimesis*. The English dramatist was by and large praised

⁶¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 94 (SKS 11, 98). See for comparison Plato's deliberation on *mimesis* and craftsmanship.

as a genius by the Dane; however, in his earlier “Letter to the Reader” he contends that Shakespeare is not a religious author and therefore does not break with immanence.

Summa summarum, H.H. clarifies that the Apostle Paul should not be perceived as a genius because his writing skills “rank rather low.”⁶¹⁹ At the same time, he should not be perceived as an ordinary person (“no immanence of eternity places him essentially on the same line with all human beings”⁶²⁰), because the Apostle Paul “has something paradoxically new to bring.”⁶²¹ Hence, the difference between a genius and an apostle is qualitative—the former belongs to immanence, the latter to transcendence.⁶²² Furthermore, a genius is born with authority and has it in himself; and yet this authority is of human origin, contrary to the divine authority of an Apostle that is given to her. Applying a slightly Hegelian twist to the concept of genius, H.H. notices that a genius *qua* genius is *kata dynamin*, which means that she is one in her potentiality, and that quality may take time to develop fully. Furthermore, a genius may be born ahead of her times, thus a certain paradoxicality often accompanies their growth. Nonetheless, this quality eventually “vanishes”⁶²³ and in some cases “the human race...assimilates the one-time paradoxical in such a way that it is no longer paradoxical.”⁶²⁴

For Kierkegaard, what he diagnoses as a common disregard for the qualitative difference between a genius and an apostle in previous accounts has a moral foundation. It results from deceit and thoughtlessness, categories of character directly and indirectly assigned to the sophist by Plato. Here the influence of the Platonic presentation of the ideal self on Kierkegaard comes into the picture. Plato’s presentation of the genuine self is framed by his evaluation of the nature of sophistry. This is to say that his debunking of the sophist is not an end in itself, rather it serves as a background for the inauguration of the true philosopher. This act of exposing the sophist as an imposter appeals to our common sense and our faculty of judgment; given we naturally follow that which is morally good and honest, we want to steer clear of sophists. Moreover, the mode of presentation of the ideal self already suggests potential forms of discernment by equipping us with, or making us sensitive

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*

⁶²² *Ibid.*

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, p. 94-5 (SKS 11, 98-9).

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*

to, categories of trustworthiness, volition, and personal integrity, which Plato understands in a particular way and clearly outlines.

It follows that the sophist undergoes some introspection, by which he recognizes that he does not know what he teaches; such imitators “*strongly suspect and fear* that they are ignorant of the things which they pretend before the public to know,” as the Stranger elucidates.⁶²⁵ Negative moral appraisal of the sophist continues as he appears as someone who is prone to mislead his hearers deliberately and takes money for his teaching, even though he teaches untruth. The Stranger, in his philosophical method of discernment, or as he calls it, “purification,”⁶²⁶ invites the reader to make an evaluative comparison. Reading such a presentation of the sophist, we suspect him of taking advantage of his students and (naturally) attribute to him *bad will, lack of credibility and compromised personal integrity*. In short, we apply these categories of discernment articulated by Plato (the standards just laid bare before us) to the given framework, which he also sets.

In his dialogue Plato employs a philosophical and literary device of comparison built upon the relation between identity and difference, which itself is also a form of discernment. The sophist is like the philosopher (for instance, both meet their interlocutors in private), but is also different from him (the sophist claims things he cannot articulate truthfully, while the philosopher openly claims that he does not have any truth apart from the truthfulness of that claim). By emphasizing the difference, Plato cultivates in the audience of his dialogues, who are considered to be truthful pursuers of truth, an inner attitude that acclaims the Stranger and condemns the sophist. Through the figure of the philosopher, Plato constructs and subsequently implements an image of the ideal self, and thus convinces the audience of the truthfulness of his thesis.

H.H.’s essay resembles the *Sophist* in many ways. First, as I have shown, in its methodology of juxtaposition and discernment the essay “mimics” the issue discussed in the dialogue, which can be reformulated as the difference between the sophist and the philosopher. Second, Kierkegaard’s representation of the Apostle in the essay aligns with Plato’s description of the true philosopher from the dialogue, though the genius is not necessarily aligned with the sophist. For instance, like the true

⁶²⁵ Plato, *Sophist*, 268a. Following Fowler’s translation; emphasis mine.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, 226d-e. “Every discernment or discrimination of that kind as I have observed, is called purification.”

philosopher from Plato's dialogues, the Apostle does not concentrate on his skills and knowledge,⁶²⁷ but rather appeals to the "divine and spiritual sign."⁶²⁸ The Apostle Paul should not care about "beautiful metaphors...[or] whether the image is beautiful or threadbare and obsolete," as this is what concerns the sophist as the maker of semblances.⁶²⁹ Additionally, the Apostle takes responsibility for producing the right representations of his divine authority. This is contrary to the sophist, who is not accountable for the appearances of himself he makes. Third, in a similar manner to Plato's account in the *Sophist* of the contemporary problem of morally questionable imitation and its consequences, the essay is a reference to the considerations of *mimesis* contemporary to Kierkegaard. It criticizes the modern relinquishment and disparagement of reference to a model in artistic (but not only artistic) production. It also evaluates the consequences for Christianity of the modern turn to aesthetics by addressing the new leading concepts of genius and originality.⁶³⁰

It is important to notice that on the side of Kierkegaard's criticism of modernity, the introduction and elevation of doubt had theological (religious) and anthropological repercussions. First, it contributed to the abolition of the theological dimension of authority. Kierkegaard's discussion of divine authority has a macro and micro breadth. Although we will concentrate on the former, it suffices to say that the latter can be traced in a parallel way to *The Two Ethical-Religious Essays*, posthumously published as *The Book on Adler*.⁶³¹ Kierkegaard refers to the real case of Adolph Adler, a dismissed bishop and his contemporary and peer who claimed to have experienced a revelation from God, in order to investigate divine authority in the context of modern speculative philosophy.⁶³² What is of importance to our investigation is that in *The Book on Adler* Kierkegaard aims to put in order relations between the universal, the single individual and the special individual, which is the

⁶²⁷ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 96 (SKS 11, 100). "Paul must not appeal to his brilliance, since in that case he is a fool; he must not become involved in a purely esthetic of philosophic discussion of the content of the doctrine, since in that case he is absentminded."

⁶²⁸ See Plato, *Apology*, 31c-d.

⁶²⁹ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 96 (SKS 11, 100) and Plato, *Sophist*, 236a.

⁶³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 93 (SKS 11, 97). "When the sphere of the paradoxical-religious is now abolished or it is explained back into the esthetic, an apostle becomes neither more nor less than a genius, and then good night to Christianity. Brilliance and spirit, revelation and originality, the call from God and genius, and apostle and a genius—all this end up being just the same."

⁶³¹ Part of "The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle" consists of a fragment from *The Book on Adler*; see endnote no. 47 from *Without Authority*, p. 96, footnote no. 47 explained in *Without Authority*, p. 292.

⁶³² Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, p. 5 (*Pap.* VIII-2 B 27 78).

extraordinary. Interestingly enough, he names Adler “*the special individual who has a revelation-fact.*”⁶³³

On the macro scale, the pseudonymous author of “The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle” writes: “Doubt has...place[d] God on the same level with geniuses, poets and thinkers, whose utterances are simply evaluated only esthetically or philosophically.”⁶³⁴ The human capacity to first understand this and, second, to express it in a sophisticated way, makes one into a genius, or even God, as there is no absolute difference between them. Modern authority is to be found in the genius who brings content and form into perfect harmony.⁶³⁵ The elevation of genius in a world without God effectively collapses the one into the other.

The anthropological dimension of the issue can be identified by reading these two essays alongside one another. The martyr in “Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?” corresponds to the Apostle in the second essay. These two figures represent Kierkegaard’s ideal self. Both the martyr and the Apostle are often ordinary people who have their extraordinary character not *in*, but *outside* themselves. Moreover, the principle of their lives and their desire is to follow their model, Christ. Christ calls on both figures to follow Him, and this calling is far from the immediacy of the aesthetic, as it is not based on their abilities and natural endowments—it comes from the outside. The martyr, who desires to lay down his life for truth, corresponds with the Apostle who follows Christ to wherever she is sent and even considers death as the end result of her enterprise. The motivations and resolutions of each are grounded transcendently.

Likewise, the crowd from the former work corresponds to the genius from the “Difference” essay. At face value a crowd is what it is by virtue of its own inner dynamics and a genius is what one is by birth; their greatness lies in themselves, not somewhere else. However, to a large degree Kierkegaard challenges this view, in what Girard calls “*mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*,”⁶³⁶ the Romantic lie and the novelistic truth. In short, this view identifies a paradox of dependence and autonomy in the Romantic self, which claims ultimate freedom as its ideal. This was supposed to be realized, among other ways, in genius. Such an understanding of

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶³⁴ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 97 (SKS 11, 100).

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁶ The original title of Girard’s *Deceit Desire and the Novel* is in fact *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*.

genius pervades many of Kierkegaard's writings.⁶³⁷ Girard demonstrates that the Romantic self is not ultimately independent—hence the “romantic lie”—and, as modern literature reveals, it is determined by other people—hence “the literary truth.”⁶³⁸ This corresponds with what I alluded to briefly in the previous chapter, namely, Girard's idea of the interindividual, according to which all human beings participate in this ongoing process of mutual constitution based in the idea of reflexive mimeticism.⁶³⁹

Consequently, in the first of H.H.'s essays, the crowd is defined as collectively imitating itself. What is desired is a complete identity, and by imitating the desires of others, the crowd becomes unanimous in persecuting and sacrificing the scapegoat. Is a genius not different from other people? Kierkegaard's answer is yes, as he often reiterates that a genius is exempted from the crowd. However, the difference between a genius and a crowd is not absolute; this is contrary to what the Romantic vision entails. Is a genius not the other? The other or the ultimate qualitative difference lies in the category of authority. H.H. repeats: “If the authority is not the other, if in any way it should indicate merely an intensification within the identity, then there simply is no authority.”⁶⁴⁰ The difference between single human beings is not ultimate; rather it is only a “factor within the totality and quality of identity.”⁶⁴¹ The difference between people *qua* people is only quantitative as there is a certain “essential likeness lying immanently at the basis of all other human differences.”⁶⁴² H.H. does not disregard this factor. However, in relation to eternity, the genius that composes its own self and its own new world creates castles in the air that have no ultimate validity.

⁶³⁷ Moreover, Kierkegaard perceived himself in that spirit as “a genius in a market town;” see Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 95 (SKS 16, 74).

⁶³⁸ This comparison requires some further clarifications that are not crucial in this context. Suffice it to say that, for Girard “the romantic lie” concerns the illusion of the self-sufficiency of the Romantic self, exemplified by the novelistic protagonist-hero, who is dependent on her model-rival. See for example: Andrew O'Shea, *Selfhood and Sacrifice. René Girard and Charles Taylor on the Crisis of Modernity*, New York and London: Continuum 2010, p. 58. “Girard's early work clears a path through the underground of human experience, where we paradoxically witness the hero's sense of self-sufficiency depending more and more on a model/rival, at the cost of increasing dissonance within the self, and between self and other... The illusion of originality only conceals the fact that we must borrow our desires and secretly attempt to pass them off as our own, thus deceiving others, but ourselves most of all. This Romantic lie, according to Girard...” See also Harold Bloom's criticism of the Romantic self as articulated in Agata Bielik-Robson, *The Saving Lie: Harold Bloom and Deconstruction*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2011, pp. 70-3.

⁶³⁹ See Scott Cowdell, *Abiding Faith: Christianity Beyond Certainty, Anxiety, and Violence*, James Clark: Cambridge 2010, p. 78. and Douglas Hedley, *Sacrifice Imagined: Violence, Atonement, and the Sacred*, New York and London: Continuum 2011, p. 176.

⁶⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 99 (SKS 11, 102).

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100 (SKS 11, 103).

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 101 (SKS 11, 104).

From the perspective of divine authority these constructs are mere fantasy, “something vanishing.”⁶⁴³

Moreover, as I noted in relation to the Apostle, if he “had power in the worldly sense, had great influence and powerful connections, by which forces one is victorious over people’s opinions and judgments”⁶⁴⁴ and used it, “he would define his endeavour in essential identity with the endeavour of other people.”⁶⁴⁵ This fragment shows that the extraordinary means of influence that are often attributed to genius⁶⁴⁶ in fact represent something all people truly desire: power. Although a genius is different from the crowd, it desires what others desire, which means that one, putting it in Girardian terms, desires power.⁶⁴⁷ Furthermore, on the one hand, the crowd desires genius for its own sake and thus, in a certain sense, elevates one of its members (genius) into the position of a mediator of its desire. On the other hand, the genius becomes the crowd’s imitative double, entering into a vicious relation between desire and violence.⁶⁴⁸

H.H. notices that both the genius and the Apostle will be “offensive in our day, when the crowd, the masses, the public, and other such abstractions seek to turn everything upside down.”⁶⁴⁹ This is related to the paradoxicality of their natures. Nevertheless, genius is “the unity of being a useless superfluity and a costly ornament,” a dichotomy that has a relative validity to the crowd and that will eventually be understood and worked out by humanity. The genius’s conspicuous master is its double, the crowd. The Apostle’s validity is qualified by eternity, and God is its master.

In this chapter I elaborated the representational dimension of Kierkegaard’s authorship. I demonstrated that the “how” of his presentation of his ideas in his writings is not value-neutral, nor unintentional, rather it is inseparable from the communicated content. I showed that Kierkegaard was an active participant in the

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105 (SKS 11, 109).

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106 (SKS 11, 110). “He surely acquires significance, perhaps even great significance...” On the relationship between genius and power see: Bruno, *Kant’s Concept of Genius*, especially chapters “Origins of Genius,” pp. 9-57 and “Genius,” pp. 99-141.

⁶⁴⁷ On a broader outlook of the problem see: Robert Doran, “Imitation and Originality: Creative Mimesis in Longinus, Kant and Girard,” *René Girard and Creative Mimesis*, ed. by Thomas Ryba, Lanham: Lexington Books 2014, pp. 117-20.

⁶⁴⁸ Chris Fleming, *René Girard. Violence and Mimesis*, Cambridge: Polity 2004, pp. 19-22.

⁶⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 107 (SKS 11, 110).

important scholarly discussion of *mimesis* among his early and late contemporaries, contributing a unique understanding of modern aesthetics and a less naïve account of human creativity and autonomy.

The analyses in this part of my dissertation prove the deeply mimetic dimension of Kierkegaard's oeuvre, which is most evident both in his engagement with various aspects of representation and in the structure and composition of his work. This gives us a more complex understanding of Kierkegaard as a thinker and author, and rehabilitates his authorship as an important part of the ongoing discourse on *mimesis* by situating him and his work in a broader historical, literary and philosophical context.

Lastly, this chapter provides a fundamental point of departure for Chapter Four, in which I will discuss representation in relation to another aspect of Kierkegaard's engagement with *mimesis*, namely enactment. It also forms a part of the mimetic understanding of the self as an unfolding and "interpretative" image, which I will examine in detail in the fifth and final chapter of the dissertation.

IV. CHAPTER FOUR: TRANS-FORMATION

So far I have addressed two fundamental facets of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard's production, imitation and representation. My analysis commenced with a consideration of the former, which I discussed in Chapter One. There I showed that imitation is the most analysed aspect of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard's production and that the scholarship is dominated by a religious (theological)-ethical rendering of and a conceptual approach to imitation understood as "following after." In Chapter Two I gradually moved to a structural reading of Kierkegaard's imitation, arguing for a plurality of mimetic models. I contended that, contrary to the prevailing reading of Kierkegaard's imitation as entailing one particular model for imitation, the author considers other or additional mimetic models, which I classified as internal and external. Moreover, drawing upon the notion of a plurality of mimetic models in Kierkegaard, I identified a unique example of the model in Kierkegaard's writings, namely Socrates. What follows, I contributed the Socratic dimension of Kierkegaard's imitation, both challenging "the religious genealogy" of his "following after" and complementing that reading with the non-Christian and "non-imitative" appraisals of the concept in question. In the previous chapter I considered representation' in the Dane's works by identifying *ekphrasis* and *eikastic* and *fantastic mimeses* and their roles in Kierkegaard's conceptualization of image, text and self. I demonstrated that these aesthetic means of presentation are deeply interrelated with their religious content. This is to say that, contrary to the prevalent view that Kierkegaard's aesthetics and his religious philosophy are mutually exclusive, I argued for their mutual interdependency.

My main goal for this chapter is to show that *mimesis* in Kierkegaard entails emulation and enactment, and so defined, it underwrites his account of the formation of the human self. It is a type of *mimesis* that surpasses the imitated model, therefore differs from it. It also has a performative dimension, which means it features and demands action. Subsequently, in this penultimate part of my research, I will progressively shift from an understanding of *mimesis* as representation to emulation and enactment, and argue that these mimetic notions have transformative and existential dimensions for Kierkegaard. Nevertheless, especially in the first part of this section, drawing upon the already-analysed tensions between imitation and representation in Kierkegaard's oeuvre, I will demonstrate the mutual relation

between the aesthetic and the ethical-religious dimensions of his thought present in his autobiographical and semi-autobiographical notes. I will show that these texts do not just express the life of the Danish author (art represents life), but also augment his existence and affect its makeup (life emulates art). So comprehended, they are examples of Kierkegaard's attempts at self-imitation. As a model and point of departure for such thinking I will consider Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his *Confessions*.

In the second part of this chapter, availing myself of the Aristotelian understanding of *mimesis* as a dynamic change, and the notion of "figuration" in Ricoeur, I will examine Kierkegaard's concepts of redoubling, reduplication and double reflection as forms of existential *mimesis* of transformation. This analysis will demonstrate that the notions of redoubling, reduplication and double reflection, often ignored by scholars in the mimetic context, are as fundamental to Kierkegaard's rendering of *mimesis* as his concept of "following after."⁶⁵⁰ Consequently, this examination will present a more comprehensive and far-reaching account of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard's works

1. Narrative and Self-Formation⁶⁵¹

Kierkegaard's scarce presence in contemporary studies in autobiography is surprising for an author of two fictitious diaries, extensive journals and notebooks, and published and unpublished accounts of his authorship. If we interpret Kierkegaard's authorship as a form of autobiography (which might be a bit too much), or as an autobiographically driven or inspired work, the necessity for the inquiry is compelling.⁶⁵² On the other hand, Kierkegaard never produced an autobiography *per*

⁶⁵⁰ As presented in Chapter One, in her *Living Poetically*, Walsh associates reduplication with imitation and describes it as "actualization of the Christian ideality in existence." However, apart from hinting at some possible Platonic renderings of imitation, she does not explain the "process" of actualization as such and therefore we do not know *how* and *why* it occurs. See Walsh, *Living Poetically*, pp. 228-9.

⁶⁵¹ For the brevity of this examination, I will not discuss the relation between text and formation as *Bildungsroman*. Such an inquiry is beyond the scope of this thesis as it would require a *meta* elaboration on Kierkegaard's understanding of upbuilding and an analysis of his earlier production.

⁶⁵² See first and foremost Joakim Garff's *magnum opus*: *Søren Kierkegaard* as an account of Kierkegaard's production read—to a considerable extent—as an example of autobiographically driven or inspired work; see also George Pattison, "A Dialogical Approach to Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding Discourses*," *Journal for the History of Modern Theology (Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte)*, vol. 3, issue 2, 1996, pp. 185-202. The author's "dialogical" reading of some of Kierkegaard's *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* shows that they deal with the problem of crisis

se, like Augustine's *Confessions*, but rather provides us with "points of view."⁶⁵³ The historian of Kierkegaard, Bruce H. Kirmmse, seems to reinforce such a standpoint, as he opens his *Encounters with Kierkegaard: A Life as Seen by His Contemporaries* by a laconic comment that "Kierkegaard left neither memoirs nor an autobiography."⁶⁵⁴ However, while on the surface a true statement, Kirmmse's claim might well be viewed as somewhat problematic in light of the current research of the autobiography genre.⁶⁵⁵ My contention here is that Kierkegaard is indeed an author of autobiographical texts, which have a formative character and ultimately contribute to the creation of the author's self. I would like to open my presentation of this argument by first explaining how autobiography contributes to the creation of the self.

As set in Georges Gusdorf's "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," the advent of the genre—a fairly late phenomenon in human history—results from several interrelated factors, of which the most fundamental are: "[the] conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life"⁶⁵⁶ and a reversal of a certain natural order of attentions from the world to oneself.⁶⁵⁷ Moreover, an autobiographer considers him/herself as sufficiently important to be worthy of remembering.⁶⁵⁸ These two factors lead Gusdorf to speak of "a spiritual revolution [where] the artist and the model coincide."⁶⁵⁹

Autobiography allows the author to have an "immediate" access to oneself, which biography, as a mere historical work, does not provide. Consequently, it brings something new to the subject. It allows one to grasp an image of oneself, for autobiography is a kind of a mirror in which one reflects one's own image. Gusdorf

drawing on personal, historical and social issues, giving them a theological, philosophical and ethical output.

⁶⁵³ See: Joakim Garff, "The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and *Points of View* with Respect to Kierkegaard's 'Activity as an Author' in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 1998, pp. 75-102.

⁶⁵⁴ Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Encounters with Kierkegaard: A Life as Seen by His Contemporaries*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1996, p. xi.

⁶⁵⁵ See for example chapter "Sixty Genres of Life Narrative" in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2010, pp. 253-86.

⁶⁵⁶ Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," transl. by James Olney, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1980, p. 29.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31. Kierkegaard, but also Montaigne or Rousseau are not of high origin. The first two were the sons of merchants, the other one, "no more than a common citizen of Geneva...in spite of their lowly station on the stage of the world, [they] considered their destiny worthy of being given by way of example."

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

elucidates, “The image is another ‘myself,’ a double of my being but more fragile and vulnerable, invested with a sacred character that makes it at once fascinating and frightening.”⁶⁶⁰ As autobiography gives a condensed image of oneself, or is itself that image, one that captures and interprets life in a certain totality, apart from being a source of knowledge of the self, it is also that which affects the self. So understood, autobiography allows for a relationship between one and oneself, leads *from one to oneself*. Adding this relational-reflective dimension to the self, which, following the famous exposition of the self as “relation that relates to itself” from *The Sickness Unto Death*, is fundamental to self’s self-constitution.⁶⁶¹ Autobiography eventually changes and expands the self.⁶⁶² What initially was the movement from the self to the text is now reversed—the self emerges from the text; hence, the text contributes to the creation of the self.

Moreover, this textual creation is, by and large, a profoundly mimetic phenomenon, because it interrelates the representational and emulative dimensions of Kierkegaard’s oeuvre. This becomes evident when we take the author as the reader of his autobiography; here the narrative discourse emerges as an environment where the self encounters, comprehends and encapsulates itself. Following that understanding, the account of the self represented in a narrative discourse, is not merely a form of its presentation to, or persuasive communication with the external world, but a presentation to itself and communication with itself; that is, a means of engaging with and reconstitution of oneself, hence, of self-creation in the public-non-public space of text. On the one hand, so rendered formation of the self happens not just “out there” in the world, where the true existence should take place (ethical-religious), but also unfolds and advances in and through text, displaying a form of existence. On the other hand, that type of existence transcends its textual environment, and manifests itself in the actuality of one’s self. Autobiography so defined, which in this two-fold

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 32. It is important to notice that the advent of autobiography is linked with the popularity of silvered-backed mirrors produced by Venetian technique. For the brevity of this examination, the subject of mirror in Kierkegaard’s first authorship has to be abandoned. However, this is an important part of Kierkegaard’s engagement with *mimesis*, as it links the modern daily accessibility of mirror, the cause of stress and anxiety, and Kierkegaard’s works the thinker offers as a new type of healing and edifying mirror.

⁶⁶¹ It is important to notice that this reflexive movement of the self, where the self relates to oneself in autobiography, seems to run parallel to Kierkegaard’s famous account of the formation of the self from *The Sickness Unto Death*, where the self’s constitution is based on its relationally and reflectivity. See Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, pp. 13-4 (SKS 11, 129-30).

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

dialectical movement interrelates the realm of actuality and textual possibility, is thus part of Kierkegaard's authorship.

In my consideration of the mimetic formation of the self in Kierkegaard, I will first briefly refer to Rousseau as a writer-model who exemplifies this type of mimetic feat in his works. Subsequently, I will show the mimetic process of self-formation and self-imitation undertaken by Kierkegaard in (and *via*) two types of texts. First, I will analyse Kierkegaard's development of life story, emphasizing evolution, repetitive reappropriation, and interpretation of the story by the author. Second, I will identify another of Kierkegaard's life-stories, so to speak — an alternative to the "official" one—by which Kierkegaard's life is projected into his pseudonymous text "Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth." To understand the latter I will turn to Girard's theory of mimetic desire and Paul Ricoeur's concept of mimetic arc.

A. Rousseau: an autobiography, a confession and self-presentation

We find two classic examples of the subjective *I* in literature, in the works of Augustine and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. With some reservations, both figures could be perceived as models for Kierkegaard of authors who aimed to textually present the human subject in time.⁶⁶³ Suffice to say, confession plays an important role in Kierkegaard's authorship for many reasons, some that are religious and ethical; and it also virtually makes up a certain genre in his production. Crucial for this investigation are those aspects of confession that make it a public act, and that reveal what was hidden in the human soul. Although strongly present in the Lutheran tradition, public confession is taken by Kierkegaard outside of the walls of a church building. Kierkegaard is so fixated on confession that he requires it not just from himself, but

⁶⁶³ These reservations pertain especially to Kierkegaard's reception of Rousseau; however, Augustine would not be so easily exempted from them. I infer about a certain affinity of ideas between the two authors of *Confessions* and the Dane from a comparative perspective rather than historical and textual. For supportive appraisals see: Vincent A. McCarthy, "Jean-Jacque Rousseau: Presence and Absence," *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions: Philosophy*, t. 1, *Kierkegaard Research. Sources, Reception and Resources*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2009, pp. 147-61; and Robert Puchniak, "Augustine: Kierkegaard's Tempered Admiration of Augustine," *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions, Kierkegaard Research. Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 4, ed. by Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2008, pp. 11-20.

demands it from church officials, like Bishop Mynster.⁶⁶⁴ Moreover, his hermeneutics of the famous story of “the woman who was a sinner” could be interpreted as confession.⁶⁶⁵ Kierkegaard recognizes the literary genre of *confessions* as publicly presenting the naked and humiliated *I*.

So comprehended, Augustine is aware that he stands in front of God, therefore the formulations of his philosophical and theological thoughts, and the portrayal and consequent recognition of his own self in the text, is “secured” by the honesty of Christian faith.⁶⁶⁶

A similar, but different, honesty of self-representation in a narrative is found in Rousseau. In the opening section of his *Confession*, Rousseau assures that how he truly portrayed himself in the following work:

Let the trumpet of the Day of Judgment sound when it will, I will present myself before the Sovereign Judge with this book in my hand. I will say boldly: ‘This is what I have done, what I have thought, what I was...I have shown myself as I was...I have unveiled my inmost self even as Thou hast seen it, O Eternal Being. Gather round me the countless host of my fellow-men; let them hear my confessions, lament for my worthiness, and blush for my imperfections. Then let each of them in turn reveal, with the same frankness, the secrets of his heart at the foot of the Throne, and say, if he dare, *I was better than that man!*’⁶⁶⁷

In this text we can identify three parties: the writer, the transcendent authoritative body, and the recipients. In a similar manner to Augustine, whose confessions are made before God, Rousseau calls on authority defined vaguely in terms of Christian eschatological language, in the presence of which he wants to deliver his life testimony.⁶⁶⁸ We need not, of course, assume that Rousseau intended

⁶⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 6, p. 491, entry 6853 (SKS 25, 262; NB28:56). In general, different types of confessions [*Tilstaaelse*] can be identified in Kierkegaard’s production, like private and public; it seems, though, especially towards the late production, Kierkegaard stresses the need for a confession that is a form of admissions [*Indrømmelse*].

⁶⁶⁵ See George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology*, London and New York: Routledge 2002, p. 210.

⁶⁶⁶ Gusdorf, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography,” p. 33. “...a soul of genius presents his balance sheet before God in all humility—but also in full rhetorical splendor.”

⁶⁶⁷ Jean-Jacque Rousseau, *Confessions*, Wordsworth: Hertfordshire 1996, p.3.

⁶⁶⁸ See a comparison of both *Confessions* in Ann Hartle “Augustine and Rousseau: Narrative and Self-Knowledge in the Two *Confessions*,” *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. by Gareth B. Matthews, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1999, p. 263-85.

this scenario to be taken in a literal manner, but it does provide a powerful context for his readers. Following Gebauer's and Wulf's interpretation, according to which "the justificatory character of the *Confessions* shows that Rousseau intends to exercise an effect on his audience,"⁶⁶⁹ I take Rousseau's Judgement Day reference to be referring to human judgment as a whole. Consequently, in what follows, I interpret the transcendent authoritative figure as Rousseau's fellow-men, and in this sense Rousseau's text has him solely accountable before other human beings. Unlike Augustine, Rousseau's confession is made before people. The effect of this removal of the (Divine) transcendent authority is that "the Sovereign Judge" is "abridged" to Rousseau's "fellow-men," and therefore the tripartite relationship is reduced to the relation of the two: the author and the recipient.

This raises a problem. How then can the recipients of the book, which is to comprise the life of the writer, decide whether it truly reflects what it is supposed to reflect? Rousseau's fellow-men do not know his real person as God does; therefore they cannot determine whether the content of the book is genuine or not. Moreover, the writer declares that those who witnessed his confessions will come up themselves with true accounts of their lives. But if, as has been just stated, there is not a way of deciding on the relation between the life of Rousseau described in the book and the life of the real person of Rousseau, it seems that the spectators of his endeavour will never become the true witnesses of his confession.

Subsequently, they cannot not respond with their confessions the way the thinker expects them to.⁶⁷⁰ Rousseau therefore either contradicts himself in this text by aiming for the impossible, or he otherwise implicitly asks for a different paradigmatic appraisal of the *Confessions* as a text that does not distinguish itself from its author. I would suggest the latter.

Accordingly, to "know" Rousseau is to engage with the book by means of abstracting from or "suspending" the actual historical figure that walked the streets of Geneva. Following that appraisal, one could say that the real addresses desired by the thinker—the fellow-men—are the readers of the delivered text. "The readers...are put

⁶⁶⁹ Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 210.

⁶⁷⁰ See a different account of the problem of the relationship of the individual (self) and the community in *Confession* as the problem of the relationship of (the lack of) recognition and witnessing in Catherine Malabou, "Is Confession the Accomplishment of Recognition?: Rousseau and the Unthought of Religion in the Phenomenology of Spirit," *Hegel & the Infinite: Religion, Politics And Dialectic*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett, Davis Creston, New York: Columbia University Press 2011, pp. 19-30.

in the position of an audience, as simultaneous witnesses and judges of Rousseau's *I*."⁶⁷¹ Following the life-story of the author, the readers determine the authenticity of the author solely by judging the text. The author is not external to the text, although initially "detached" from it, but the voice within it. The text, for Rousseau, is an artwork, a space where the authenticity of the author can be traced, and this is how he himself wants to be identified. Gebauer and Wulf make this point well:

His autobiography is thus much more than a description of a life or even the production of his own life. The world of his literary production is the actual, real world for him as well as for his readers...As a support for his interpretation, Rousseau needs the reader, who shared his view and defends it along with him.⁶⁷²

For them, Rousseau's text is not exactly a biographical text; it is rather a point of view on a biography, and as a point of view, the *Confessions* is a production of life. According to Gebauer and Wulf, then, Rousseau's text needs the author and the reader of the artwork to reinforce the author's opinion of himself. However, a more thorough inspection of the *Confessions* reveals another specific state of affairs that gravely challenges that relationship between the two: that is, Rousseau distinguishes himself as a reader of the very text. This greatly adds to the understanding of the judging body that has so far been identified as his fellow-men; Rousseau transits from the position of the author into the one that is supposed to decide whether the work is genuine or not. The upshot is a further contraction of the three parties to the confessional trope, according to which the author, the work, and the reader have been collapsed into one. Rousseau himself is the writer, the authority, and the recipient. Further, the discussion within the text represents a discourse commenced by the self-reflective *I*. To justify that reading I would like to turn again to his work, quoting at length from the very opening passage:

I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent, and which will never find an imitator. I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature, and that man myself.

Myself alone! I know the feelings of my heart, and I know men. I am not made like any of those I have seen; I venture to believe that I am not made like

⁶⁷¹ Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 210.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 206.

any of those who are in existence. If I am not better, I am different. Whether Nature has acted rightly or wrongly in destroying the mould in which she cast me, can only be decided after I have been read.⁶⁷³

The quote suggests that Rousseau embarks on a task that has never been accomplished before him and that will never be repeated. The task consists of presenting the likeness of a man. He will execute that by offering more than an analysis of his life, but of himself. This examination comprises narrative presentation of that *I* and its life as the necessary components. The *Confessions* is not a deliberately pre-organized literary construction that has been shaped by social expectations or political agenda. On the contrary, to quote Starobinsky, “Rousseau lets his emotions speak and agrees to write from dictation.”⁶⁷⁴

Anticipating Kierkegaard’s rendering of the single individual, Rousseau’s narrative self-presentation and self-formation consist in differentiation from social structures and other human beings (“If I am not better I am different”), and in writing and reading himself—(“...after I have been read”). Agreeing with Rousseau’s “an undertaking, hitherto without precedent,”⁶⁷⁵ I nonetheless argue that his expectation that his endeavour will not find “imitators” was not to be fulfilled. In fact among them, I argue, is Kierkegaard, to whom I will now turn.

B. Kierkegaard: autobiography; and from self-presentation to formation of the self

The term “narrative formation”⁶⁷⁶ has its distinctive meaning in studies of the self and identity—disciplines cultivated at the crossroads of various academic fields, including psychology, anthropology, cultural studies, theory of literature, philosophy and narratology.⁶⁷⁷ However, for the purposes of this research, I limit the

⁶⁷³ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 3.

⁶⁷⁴ Following Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 207.

⁶⁷⁵ Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 3.

⁶⁷⁶ The narrative approach coined in the context of identity studies links the self with various aspects of self-consciousness. Firstly, similarly to the ethical-ontological configuration of the self, I argue for its narrative formation interrelated with one’s understanding of oneself. I explore narrative aspects of the self predominantly connected with the textual formation of the self, not particularly related to the spectrum of self-consciousness.

⁶⁷⁷ See in this regard *Narrative and Identity, Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*, ed. Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh, Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company 2001.

understanding of narrative in terms of the formation of the self to two characteristics. First, following Jerome Bruner, “[it] should center upon people and their intentional states: their desires, beliefs, and so on; and [it] should focus on how these intentional states led to certain kinds of activities.”⁶⁷⁸ Second, narrative here pertains to narrative discourse, which is an account of events arranged orderly in time. Moreover, it involves the so-called “telling-frame,” where, following the James Phelan’s famous characterisation, “somebody [is] telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purposes that something happened.”⁶⁷⁹

Having noted that, it is important to emphasize that I will not examine the complex issue of human agency to which narrative studies dedicate a vast degree of investigation.⁶⁸⁰ Furthermore, in this work I understand narrative formation of the self as a way of constructing ourselves through telling stories or producing written narratives that in effect lead us to gaining essential knowledge about ourselves.⁶⁸¹ In short, instead of approaching a text as expressing the self, I see the text as in fact shaping it.⁶⁸²

As was already suggested, the reason for applying such an approach to Kierkegaard’s works is to look at his autobiographical notes as formative texts, a methodology parallel to the one applied to Rousseau’s *Confessions*. Kierkegaard’s autobiographical texts participate in a formative process of the self through a constant and repetitive process of self-recognition, self-interpretation, and self-understanding.⁶⁸³ This self-formation is a manifestation, but also a part of Kierkegaard’s dynamic self-imitation undertaken *via* a textual externalization of his

⁶⁷⁸ See: Jerome Bruner, “Self-Making and World-Making,” *Narrative and Identity, Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*, p. 28.

⁶⁷⁹ James Phelan, *Living to Tell About It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 18, p. 217. In the present context, the “somebody else” from Phelan’s definition is the author himself.

⁶⁸⁰ See for that already discussed in Chapter One: Stokes, *Kierkegaard’s Mirrors* and also a collection of essays *Narrative, Identity and the Kierkegaardian Self* ed. by Patrick Stokes and John Lippitt, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2015.

⁶⁸¹ Peter Redman, “The narrative formation of identity revisited”, *Narrative Inquiry*, vol. 15, issue 1, 2005, p. 27. “[...] in telling stories, we both ‘make up’ our selves [...]” Redman’s allusion to Graham Dawson’s *Soldier heroes: British adventure, empire and the imagining of masculinities*, London: Routledge 1994.

⁶⁸² See hints on that idea in Kierkegaard’s “first authorship” present in Joakim Garff, “A Matter of Mimesis: Kierkegaard and Ricoeur on Narrative Identity,” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, vol. 20, issue 1, 2015, pp. 321-34.

⁶⁸³ In my opinion, which I present below, Kierkegaard gives more than one account of his life purposes and desires. Various autobiographical remarks constitute the manner of approaching Kierkegaard’s authorship; explications on relation(s) between signed and pseudonymous writings and his journals inform us who the author is, or more clearly, how the author wants us, his readers, to perceive him. See also Chapter Three on fantastic *mimesis*.

self. Thus, in this section, I will illustrate the advancement of Kierkegaard's accounts of himself and his authorship over the course of his writing that deeply demonstrates the narrative and mimetic formation of his self.

The year 1846 marks the publication of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, written by the pseudonymous Johannes Climacus. The work is important for a number of reasons, especially for the fact that in that piece Kierkegaard for the first time both publicly admits "the ownership" of his pseudonyms⁶⁸⁴ and informs his readers about the objectives of his authorship—the relation between signed and pseudonymous publications.⁶⁸⁵ This year is also crucial since it is the turning point in Kierkegaard's production. The *Postscript* is to be the last of his literary enterprise, and the Dane is about to make his life as a rural pastor somewhere in Denmark.⁶⁸⁶ In the chapters "A First and Last Explanation" and "A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature," the author explains that although his pseudonyms are his creation⁶⁸⁷ they represent independent perspectives and what they claim should be assigned only to them, not to Kierkegaard himself.⁶⁸⁸ Pseudonymous works are not as essential as the signed ones as they are aesthetic writings. Reading them as containing religious thoughts would be misleading. Merely through their aesthetic character, their role is to draw attention to an inward reading of "the old familiar text handed down from the fathers." In this section, Kierkegaard refers to "Governance" as the "who" that played

⁶⁸⁴ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 625 (SKS 7, 596). "For the sake of form and order, I hereby acknowledge, something that really can scarcely be of interest to anyone to know, that I am, as is said, the author of *Either/Or* (Victor Eremita), Copenhagen, February 1843; *Fear and Trembling* (Johannes de Silentio), 1843; *Repetition* (Constantin Constantius), 1843; *The Concept of Anxiety* (Vigilius Haufniensis), 1844; *Prefaces* (Nicolaus Notabene), 1844; *Philosophical Fragments* (Johannes Climacus), 1844; *Stages on Life's Way* (Hilarius Bookbinder—William Afham, the Judge, Frater Taciturnus), 1845; *Concluding Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (Johannes Climacus), 1846; an article in *Fædrelandet*, no. 1168, 1843 (Victor Eremita); two articles in *Fædrelandet*, January 1846 (Frater Taciturnus)."

⁶⁸⁵ Chapters: "A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature" *Ibid.*, pp. 251-300 (SKS 7, 228-73) and "A First and Last Explanation" *Ibid.*, 625-30 (SKS 7, 569-573).

⁶⁸⁶ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 5, p. 310, entry 5873 (SKS 18, 278; JJ: 415). "It is now my intention to qualify as a pastor. For several months I have been praying to God to keep on helping me, for it has been clear to me for some time now that I ought not to be a writer any longer, something that I can be only totally or not at all. This is the reason I have not started anything new along with proof-correcting except for the little review of *Two Ages*, which, I repeat is final".

⁶⁸⁷ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 627 (SKS 7, 571). "I am the author in the figurative sense."

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.* "Therefore, if it should occur to anyone to want to quote a particular passage from the books, it is my wish, my prayer, that he will do me the kindness of citing the respective pseudonymous author's name, not mine—that is, of separating us in such a way that the passage femininely belongs to the pseudonymous author, the responsibility civilly to me."

an inspirational role in his endeavour.⁶⁸⁹

Insofar as this attempt to cease writing was unsuccessful, it stands not as the only one, but as the first one. Similarly “A First and Last Explanation”, despite its title, was not to be the last one. In 1848 Kierkegaard wrote another account of his standpoint concerning his authorship. It appears in a shortened version in 1851 under the title *On My Work as an Author*, and in full version posthumously in 1859 as *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*.⁶⁹⁰ The last one in this group of autobiographical writings, not mentioning Kierkegaard’s extensive journal entries, is *Armed Neutrality*, written in 1849 and published in 1880.⁶⁹¹

“The Accounting,” which is the first chapter from *On My Work as an Author* gives a different explanation of the relation between Kierkegaard’s signed and pseudonymous works from the one presented in the *Postscript*. Here Kierkegaard does not distance himself from the pseudonymous production; on the contrary, he claims that the pseudonymous works are, and have been, an inherent part of the production as a whole since the very beginning. Signed and pseudonymous writings taken together represent the religious in the authorship. By claiming that, Kierkegaard suggests an altered autobiographical interpretation of himself. He says:

The movement the authorship describes is: *from* ‘the poet,’ from the esthetic—*from* ‘the philosopher,’ from the speculative—to the indication of the most inward qualification of the essentially Christian; [...]. This movement was traversed or delineated *uno tenore*, in one breath, if I dare to say so—thus the authorship regarded as a totality is religious from first to last, something anyone who can see, if he wants to see, must also see.⁶⁹²

It appears that after a while Kierkegaard noticed a dissonance between authorial claims from the *Postscript* and *On My Work as an Author*. The realisation of the inconsistency is noted in a journal entry from 1850 where Kierkegaard comments on the relation between annotations concerning his authorship and autobiography in

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 628 (SKS 7, 572). “[...] Governance, who in such multitudinous ways has encouraged my endeavour [...].”

⁶⁹⁰ Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 2000, p. 449.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.* Following Hongs explanation, the relation between *Armed Neutrality* and *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* can be seen in the correspondence between the title of the Appendix to latter—“My Position as a Religious Author in ‘Christendom’ and My Strategy” and the subtitle of *Armed Neutrality* which is “On My Position as a Christian in Christendom.”

⁶⁹² Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, pp. 5-6 (SKS 13, 12).

those two publications. He affirms that his concept of authorship and his understanding of himself changed over the course of his writings. Kierkegaard also admits that in fact he did not have the correct overview of his authorship at the beginning and that his writings went through some sort of development. Although he notices the differences in expressed standpoints, he also tries to reconcile the perspectives:

With regard to that, it may be observed *both* that what I wrote then can be altogether true and that what I wrote later just as true, simply because at that time I was not as advanced in my development, still had not come to an understanding of the definitive idea for all my writing, [...]. Finally, I must add: This is how I understand the totality *now*; by no means did I have this overview of the whole from the beginning, no more than I dare to say that I immediately perceived that *telos* of the pseudonyms was maieutic, since this too, was like a phase of poetic-emptying in my own life-development.⁶⁹³

Several things have to be noted with regard to the above-quoted paragraph. First, it is almost a clear-cut example of what Gusdorf calls “the original sin of autobiography.”⁶⁹⁴ Kierkegaard tries to retain certain logical consistency in his autobiography and therefore has recourse to multiple attempts at justification by applying particular hermeneutic keys, meta-perspectives, or internal rules as means of rationalizing different pasts. This aspect of autobiography is to show that the author is conscious of his life and that his life is awareness-driven.

Second, the work of autobiography is in fact something historical that aims to give a certain *now* to “that which is in the process of being formed.”⁶⁹⁵ This ties in with what has been just noted, where Kierkegaard links reason, with temporality and with totality in his “This is how I understand the totality *now*.”⁶⁹⁶ Commenting on *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard notes: “The present work is an *interpretation* of something past, something traversed, something *historical*.”⁶⁹⁷

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

⁶⁹³ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 6, p. 338, entry 6654 (SKS 23, 392-3; NB 20:5).

⁶⁹⁴ Gusdorf, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography,” p. 41.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁶ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 6, p. 338, entry 6654 (SKS 23, 392-3; NB 20:5).

⁶⁹⁷ *Pap. IX B 57 347*, (Translation following Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 271).

perceives himself—he refers to part of his writings as a “phase of poetic emptying in [his] own life development.” Kierkegaard’s perception of his authorship, and in effect, of himself, changes over the course of his writings.⁶⁹⁸ A particular movement occurs within “life-development,” as he calls the whole enterprise. This movement is a narrative formation of Kierkegaard in and through his own literary production. He is the first reader of his own literary composition, and its first exegete and commentator. He is the first to be the audience of the reading of his own works, and the first recipient of upcoming interpretations of those.⁶⁹⁹ In the hermeneutic process of constant reading, re-reading and interpretation, Kierkegaard continuously establishes and re-establishes his own self and his own identity.

In his narrative projection of himself we see the author trying to apply some sort of methodology, higher sense and *telos* simultaneously to his production and to his own life. The notion of “Governance,” that previously played a limited role of mere inspiration in Kierkegaard’s literary enterprise, expands its importance over the course of the writing process. Finally, Kierkegaard claims the writing process is identical with his upbringing managed by Governance.

But in this accounting I must in an even more precise sense bring out Governance’s part in the authorship. If, for example, I were to go ahead and say that I had had an overview of the whole dialectical structure from the very beginning of the whole work as an author [...] it would be a denial and unfairness to God. [...]

If I were now to state as categorically definitely as possible Governance’s part in the whole work as an author, I know of no expression more descriptive or more decisive than this: It is Governance that has brought me up, and the upbringing is reflected in the writing process.⁷⁰⁰

Kierkegaard cannot maintain anymore what he claimed beforehand, that he as

⁶⁹⁸ See also Kierkegaard’s remarks from 1850 on the role of Bishop Mynster in his late production Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 6, p. 358, entry 6693 (SKS 24, 74; NB 21, 122). “Now if I had envisioned this completely from the beginning and there had been no Mynster, then first of all I would have had to create someone to represent the established order and firmly bolster him up. But since I did not understand my task that clearly in the beginning, I very well could have failed to notice this and the whole thing would have turned out differently, perhaps gone wrong. [...] This is how I found my proper position.”

⁶⁹⁹ *Pap. IX B 57 347* “This is now completed; the historical truth gets its due by way of direct communication, but—and this of course does not belong to the past—for this very reason my whole relationship as an author is altered.” (Translation following Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 271).

⁷⁰⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, pp. 76-7 (SKS 16, 56).

an author had an overview of the whole dialectical structure of his writing production from the very beginning.⁷⁰¹ In his mature summation, he sees less self-authorship of his own life and his production, and more of a role for Governance in both. It is not Kierkegaard himself that stands behind the production; rather it is Governance.

Such argumentation allows the Dane to recognize and recreate himself within the text. It also posits new issues of the “who” of the authorial voice of the production—an unresolved problem with which Kierkegaard unsuccessfully wrestled within the bulk of writings that ultimately weren’t published during his life. In the “Epilogue” to the unpublished *The Point of View for my Work as an Author* - chapter III: “Governance and My Authorship” - he claims that although the Governance stands behind the production, he himself is by the will of that Governance extraordinary; indeed, – verging on genius:

If the well-disposed reader has read this little book attentively, he knows what I am as an author. This is how I portray myself. [...] Humble before God, I also know—and I know, too, that precisely here it is my duty not to suppress this but to say it [...] I also know who I was, humanly speaking, that the extraordinary (verging on genius) was granted to me.⁷⁰²

In this passage, Kierkegaard accounts for the image of himself he depicts both to himself and to his readers.⁷⁰³ He supplies the reader, in both a positive and negative manner, how Kierkegaard should be perceived; and this presentation has its axiological consequences. It is as though he is saying (by way of a loose paraphrase): “this is the way I want to be perceived, and if you perceive me differently, you are someone I call a not ‘well-disposed reader’ who simply read this book ‘inattentively.’”⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰¹ George Pattison, “Kierkegaard’s Hands” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary to The Point of View*, vol. 22, Macon: Mercer University Press 2010, p. 106. “Kierkegaard himself acknowledges that he did not have a clear-cut plan for the authorship ready from the beginning that he learned what, under God, It was all about.” Pattison also points that “Philological information provided in the new Danish edition [SKS] confirms this rather more ‘chaotic’ view of the evolution of the authorship by showing how books conceived as being by ‘S. Kierkegaard, Mag. art.’ appeared under the name of one or another pseudonym.”

⁷⁰² Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 94 (SKS 13, 73-4). As a comparison see Martin Buber’s invocation to the “readers for whom [he] hope[s],” whom are those who will read the account of his life and production as a certain “way as one” in “Foreword” to his collection of essays *Pointing the Way*, transl. and ed. by Maurice S. Friedman, Atlantic Heights: Humanities Press 1990, p. xvi.

⁷⁰³ Gusdorf, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography,” p. 40. “Autobiography appears as the mirror image of a life, its double more clearly drawn—in a sense a diagram of a destiny.”

⁷⁰⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 94 (SKS 13, 73-4).

However, a very different, if not contradictory image of Kierkegaard is introduced in another work, parallel to *The Point of View*, namely *Armed Neutrality*. In this he presents himself as a quite dispensable—an accidental player—in disclosing the truly Christian. He comments, “it is completely accidental that I am the one who has the task of presenting this picture; yet someone must do it.”⁷⁰⁵

In short, there is no one single, however inconsistent, autobiographical narrative presented here. Instead, we see Kierkegaard presenting simultaneously more than one image of his self.⁷⁰⁶

C. Kierkegaard: self-formation in fiction narrative

To this point I have shown that the literary and mimetic triad of author-text-reader can be, to a certain extent, substituted by author-text-author. This means that the intended reader of the text may be the author herself. Generally speaking, text “acts” as a medium that allows the author to communicate with a reader; here the text is a temporal and topical externalization of the internal communication of the author with herself. As a model of such apprehension of the author-text-reader triad, I previously indicated Rousseau. I presented Kierkegaard as “an imitator” of Rousseau’s handling of the relation between the three, arguing that his autobiography could be perceived as a narrative that does not aim at expressing the internal identity of its author, but constructing it. Autobiography is, then, a mimetic constituent of the formation of the human self, where the self imitates itself rendered in an externalized image of itself.

Having in mind what I have just argued about Kierkegaard’s autobiographical remarks, I will now turn to another of his works, a seemingly non-autobiographical essay from 1849: “Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?” I will demonstrate that, similar to the Dane’s autobiographical entries, his pseudonymous and fictitious composition comprises a concept of the self and its process of formation that are both mimetic and textual. This means that, in a similar manner to the appropriation of his non-fictional accounts of his life stories, Kierkegaard’s fictional work is an example of his formative self-imitation. I identify these by applying Rene Girard’s “mimetic desire” and Paul Ricoeur’s “mimetic arc”

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 140 (SKS 16, 121-2).

⁷⁰⁶ See also Chapter Two for an account of plurality of imitative models in Kierkegaard.

to the aforementioned pseudonymous work of Kierkegaard, a text which I read as his fictitious extension of himself in a “would-be Kierkegaard.” Following that argument, the ethical-religious that qualifies human becoming is undeniably woven into a fabulized text.

Anyone already acquainted with Kierkegaard will not be surprised that it is difficult to locate the authorial voice in his pseudonymous “Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?”⁷⁰⁷ This conundrum is not a solitary instance, since it is part of a broader discussion in Kierkegaard studies dedicated to the issue of authorship in general. In fact, as was indicated earlier in this chapter, the subject of authorship in Kierkegaard is a highly complex matter. Scholars have extensively debated that issue, and it can be said that the main delineation of the problem could be located in defining the relation between the real figure of the Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard and the author of the Kierkegaardian authorship whose “existence” is at least implied by the very presence of the given texts.⁷⁰⁸

I do not intend to address these problems here. Nonetheless, recalling the earlier analysis of Rousseau, I do pause to ponder the fact of the existence of “the reader” (if not to say the birth of the reader) of the given text, and her response to the text. Partially inspired by the famous dictum of Roland Barthes “The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author,”⁷⁰⁹ I claim that the phenomenon of “the birth of the reader” does indeed occur in Kierkegaard’s authorship. However, unlike Barthes, I understand this birth as being *from* the author, not at her expense. This can be demonstrated by deconstructing the text by means of Girard’s and Ricoeur’s mimetic theories. In effect, I show that the author is, in Kierkegaard’s writings, not dead *a la* Barthes; to the contrary, the author, so to speak, is alive *a la* Rousseau. This also leads me to identify Kierkegaard’s narrative self-formation

⁷⁰⁷ Cf. the account presented by Burgess in “Kierkegaard, Moravian Missions, and Martyrdom,” p. 182: “H.H.’s background is unmistakable from the start. Right on the first page of the autobiographical introduction of the essay, H.H. tells how, as a child, he had been taught to meditate repeatedly on the picture of the crucified Christ.” According to Burgess, H.H. is to be identified with the man presented by the narrator in the introduction to the essay. Lee C. Barrett (in “Kierkegaard on the Problem of Witnessing while Yet Being a Sinner,” pp. 150–4) gives a different account: Here H.H. appears as the fictional author of the introduction to the essay, while the author of the main part of the essay is anonymous. The anonymous author of the essay is the man presented by H.H. in the introduction. Neither Burgess nor Barrett indicate the identity of the protagonist(s) of the main part of the essay.

⁷⁰⁸ On a more detailed discussion of this issue see Westfall, *The Kierkegaardian Author*.

⁷⁰⁹ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Art and Interpretation: An Anthology of Readings in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. by Eric Dayton, Peterborough: Broadview 1998, pp. 383–6.

embedded in the text, and in this way I show that Kierkegaard himself is narratively present in it. This textual representation of the author is deeply mimetic, I contend, and it is an instance of aforementioned self-imitation.

One can distinguish numerous triangular relationships in the structure of “Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?” in the light of Girard’s concept of mimetic desire and Kierkegaard’s authorial strategies. I would like to focus on two of those relations, which stand in mutual reference to each other, one from the introduction to the essay, and the other from its main part. The former triangular relationship consists of three characters, a formidable man who has been old since he was a child, an image of the Crucified Christ and, lastly, Christ. The man concentrates all of his attention on the object of his “veneration,” the image, which itself stands in relationship with what it represents, Christ crucified.

The second relationship is from the body of the essay; it reflects the first one, but is much more complex. On the one hand, following a certain reading convention and taking the essay as a whole, I identify three figures: Kierkegaard who is the implied author of the work, H.H. who is its pseudonymous author, and the man who appears as a protagonist in the Introduction and in the main part of the essay. On the other hand, on a closer inspection, we find in the work another triangular relation, which consists of the man, a certain image of the man as becoming a Christian, and an ideal of a Christian.

In my analyses of the identified triangular relations from the perspective of mimetic desire, I show that the man represents Kierkegaard, who is comprehended not as the author of the text, but as its protagonist who undergoes a process of transformation of the self. In the latter part of this chapter, I show that Kierkegaard frees himself from the confines of fiction, by “putting to death” the pseudonymous author of the essay, H.H.

According to Girard, after fulfilling her basic needs, a human being desires knowledge concerning her ultimate being, which is something that, on the one hand, she lacks, but on the other, is something “some other person seems to possess.”⁷¹⁰ The

⁷¹⁰ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 164-5. “When modern theorists envisage man as a being who knows what he wants, or who at least possesses an “unconscious” that knows for him, they may simply have failed to perceive the domain in which human uncertainty is most extreme. Once his basic needs are satisfied (indeed, sometimes even before) man is subject to intense desires, though he may not know precisely for what. The reason is that he desires *being*, something he

other is the mimetic model for Girard, and by imitation of that model, and precisely, by imitation of the desire the model maintains, the imitator succeeds in acquiring her being. Following that understanding, the Christian existence expressed by the mimetic of “this Crucified One, who was God, the Holy One...insofar as a human being can resemble him” is the subject of the imitation of Christ in H.H.’s essay.⁷¹¹ However, (as it was indicated in the previous chapters of this thesis and as it will be discussed in Chapter Five), this form of *mimesis*, cannot be direct, and takes place *via* a model, a prototype, or as it is the case in this essay, a particular picture defined in a sacrificial manner. This becomes evident in the author’s interchangeable usages of “him” and “the picture” as objects of imitation in the Introduction.

The man approaches the picture, H.H. tells us, and the “picture [acquires] even more power over him.” The picture dominates the man. The man loses himself in the picture; he becomes possessed by it. This is the way to perdition, perdition through the highest mediation of Christ, his sacrifice and the enterprise of atonement; nonetheless, it is perdition leading to the real relation with Christ. The man does not want to become Christ, although Christ, as portrayed here, is the object of the mimetic triad. Instead, he wants to “become himself the picture that resembled him, the Crucified One.”⁷¹² The man acquires, so to speak, “the desire” of the picture, which is the desire of representing Christ as crucified; to resemble Christ is to become oneself a picture of Crucified Christ.

As Girard puts it, “man is subject to intense desires though he may not know precisely for what.”⁷¹³ This corresponds with the man in the story, described as “[being] driven by an inexplicable power to want to resemble him.”⁷¹⁴ At the beginning, as a child, he does not know what this “almost irresistible urge” is that attracts him to the picture. Gradually he gets “closer and closer to him;” he possesses “silence which is the measure of the capacity to act.” Again, following Girard’s

himself lacks and which some other person seems to possess. The subject thus looks at that other person to inform him of what he should desire in order to acquire that being. If the model, who is apparently already endowed with superior being, desires some object, the object must surely be capable of conferring even greater plenitude of being. It is not through words, therefore, but by the example of his own desire, that the model conveys to the subject the supreme desirability of the object. We must understand that desire itself is essentially mimetic, directed toward an object desired by the model.”

⁷¹¹ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 55 (SKS 11, 61). See also: Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, p. 2. “The disciple pursues objects which are determined for him, or at least seem to be determined for him, by the model of chivalry.”

⁷¹² Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 55 (SKS 11, 61).

⁷¹³ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 154.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*

scheme, one might say that his very desire is related to what is of absolute importance for a human being: *being*. Desire so comprehended is related to the lack of *being*, or willing a new one. According to Girard, the convergence of desires results in rivalry between different parties desiring a particular thing, but also between the different parts of the triangular relationship. Here, rivalry can be also related to the alternation between desiring to be God and desiring to be (in) his image, for Girard. H.H. is aware of that problem and states, “there was nothing presumptuous in [the man’s] desire.”⁷¹⁵ The is aware of being a sinner, and of the difference between him and the Holy One.

The mimetic triangular relation between subject, model, and object presented in the Introduction reintroduces itself in the work considered as a whole. Although, as I have mentioned, it is a perilous task to determine absolutely the authorial voice(s) in the essay, and any such attempts will be eventually contestable, I propose reading Kierkegaard himself as the very first character of this essay and the main subject of the mimetic triangular relation in the work. He is the man from the Introduction (“His many thoughts are in brief summary the content of this little essay.”⁷¹⁶) and the narrator from the main part of the text. Illustrations that support that claim are found in corresponding descriptions of the man and the narrator in both parts of the essay.

It is important to notice that these descriptions, although fictional, resemble the narrative formation of the self presented in the autobiographical accounts of his life. For example, passionate virtues of reflection, courage and enthusiasm correlate with equally passionate qualities of silence, capacity to act, willingness, and firm conviction of the man from the Introduction. Moreover, the training instructions elaborated by the narrator—loaded with pathos and the mood of earnestness (“*higher*, such as it truly is for me, then this will lead to my death”⁷¹⁷)—correspond with the progression of the man’s devotion discussed by H.H. in the Introduction (“but to want to suffer for the same cause, unto death...*deeply*”⁷¹⁸). The correlation is supported by the correspondence between the progressive description of the relation of the man to the depicted image of “the Crucified One” (“the picture followed him throughout his life,” “but gradually, as he grew older, this picture acquired even more power over him”; “instead of becoming himself the picture,” “he was driven by an inexplicable

⁷¹⁵ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 55 (SKS 11, 61).

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57 (SKS 11, 63).

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71 (SKS 11, 75).

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55 (SKS 11, 61).

power,” he “forg[o]t himself to the degree;” “the picture steadily came closer and closer to him, and he felt its claim on [him] even more deeply”⁷¹⁹) and the gradually progressive process of becoming a martyr (“it should become his—no, not his *fate*, since it does not become that—if he is put to death for the truth, it is his *choice*”; “he must accept the responsibility”; “Now you stand at the beginning of being put to death”⁷²⁰).

If, following Girard, Kierkegaard, *aka* the man, is the subject of the mimetic triad in the essay, who or what are the model and object of the relationship? I argue that the model represents Kierkegaard perceived in a very atypical way. We shall call him the would-be Kierkegaard.⁷²¹ First, the would-be Kierkegaard is a fictional structure of personality and identity that narratively represents Kierkegaard’s existential symmetry with his passion to imitate Christ, which he calls “to be a very simple Christian.”⁷²² In a similar manner to the picture of the Crucified Christ from the Introduction, the would-be Kierkegaard is an image that represents Kierkegaard as a Christian. It is a poeticized or imagined version of Kierkegaard as a Christian, using Rasmussen’s terminology,⁷²³ or following Stokes, the would-be Kierkegaard is an image of what Kierkegaard “wants” to become in imagination.⁷²⁴

The would-be Kierkegaard is therefore an upshot of Kierkegaard’s production as an image-maker. This becomes evident when the narrator, after spelling out his concerns that make the title of the essay, brings another person into the picture, a person whom he has in mind and trains to become a guerrilla, terrorist or a martyr: “Now you stand at the beginning of being put to death.”⁷²⁵ The one training to be a guerrilla is indeed Kierkegaard visualised as someone who is to embark on his task of becoming a Christian, the would-be Kierkegaard. The object of imitation is then the ideal of being “a very simple Christian.” To summarize, Kierkegaard, by creating the

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 55f (SKS 11, 61).

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71 (SKS 11, 72) and *Ibid.*, p. 81 (SKS 11, 85).

⁷²¹ Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong translated “*en vordende Digter*” into “some...would-be poet,” in Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, p. 304 (SKS 14, 93).

⁷²² The would-be Kierkegaard is not symmetrical with a Christian; a Christian is in fact existential. The would-be Kierkegaard is a model that represents Kierkegaard’s projection (structure, image, and paradigm) of his existential realization of the passion to be Christian.

⁷²³ Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness*, p. 108. This poeticized “version” of oneself is a prerequisite for becoming oneself, which has a mimetic dimension for Rasmussen. “What I want to address here is how, in addition, the emphasis on ‘imitation’ marks the culmination of Kierkegaard’s intentional discontinuity with early German Romanticism and speculative idealism, and how his understanding of ‘the imitation of Christ’ *actually completes his poetics by emphasizing the transition from imagining the ideal to practicing it.*” (Italics mine).

⁷²⁴ Stokes, *Kierkegaard’s Mirrors*, pp. 76-7 and 82-3.

⁷²⁵ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 81 (SKS 11, 85).

would-be Kierkegaard and by imitating that image, thinks becoming a Christian possible. This could have been a successful enterprise, if becoming a Christian was merely a poetic undertaking.

A journal entry from 1849 regarding *The Sickness unto Death* (Kierkegaard's pseudonymous work published simultaneously with the *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*), establishes Kierkegaard's profound longing to be a "very simple Christian," as opposed to merely a poet.⁷²⁶ This reflects what Girard calls "the desire to be another"⁷²⁷ in his *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. In this light we see that, although Kierkegaard plays safe, openly admitting his poetic mode that secures him from possible criticisms, his authorship and his life is directed by what Girard calls, "the metaphysical virtue" of the object of his desire.⁷²⁸ In wanting to resemble Christ, Kierkegaard poetizes his self into a would-be self and in that sense the existential is surpassed by the poetic. Instead of becoming an actual being, he merely poetically prescribes himself as that. In wanting one thing, Kierkegaard could actually pursue another.⁷²⁹ Could this be the reason why he ultimately distanced himself from signing the essay with his own name?

Here I turn to the juxtaposition of "poetical venture" and "fiction" given by H.H. A short investigation of the mimetic relation in fiction will shed light on the concept of the mimetic for Kierkegaard's self. The Dane provides the narrative construct in which he inserts the would-be Kierkegaard disguised as the man. In that construct the man represents Kierkegaard's human desire united with the desire of faith. Kierkegaard makes an attempt to reach that would-be self *via* the narrative. The potentiality of narrative and the mimetic undermines any genuine understanding of the difference between reality and fiction.

⁷²⁶ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 6, p. 173, entry 6431 (SKS 22, 127 f., NB11:204): "Until now I have been a poet, absolutely nothing else, and it is a desperate struggle to will to go out beyond my limits...Consequently: *The Sickness unto Death* appears at this time, but pseudonymously and with me as the editor. It is said to be for upbuilding. This is more than my category, the poet category: upbuilding. The pseudonym is Johannes Anticlimacus in contrast to Climacus, who said he was not a Christian. Anticlimacus is the opposite extreme; a Christian on an extraordinary level—but I myself manage to be only a very simple Christian."

⁷²⁷ Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, p. 83. "Imitative desire is always a desire to be Another. There is only one metaphysical desire but the particular desires which instantiate the primordial desire are of infinite variety. From what we can observe directly nothing is constant in the desire of a hero of a novel. Even its intensity is variable. It depends on the degree of "metaphysical virtue" possessed by the object. And the virtue, in turn, depends on the distance between object and mediator."

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁹ René Girard, *I see Satan fall like Lightning*, transl. by James G. Williams, New York: Orbis Books 2001, pp. 14-5.

It is not evident here, whether Kierkegaard's would-be self is in fact the self that resembles Christ or one that resembles Kierkegaard's perception of Christ, and consequently is Kierkegaard's "approximate" image of Christ. Following Schweiker's idea that we all hold and hold on to a certain understanding (image) of ourselves, a would-be self is a certain paradigm that an individual designs, holds on to, and eventually wants to become. Self-consciousness of the content of that image is not enough for the successful process of the formation or becoming the desired self. On the contrary, three other things have to be considered. First, essential is the actual content of Kierkegaard's image of oneself (can the image actually represent the self that imitates Christ if Christ is not a Christian). Second, paramount here is what Stokes calls "the experience...of being directly claimed by the imagined image."⁷³⁰ Third, crucial are the mimetic structure of the self and the logic of Kierkegaard's image—the subject I will elaborate in the following chapter.

If we go back the conventional way of reading the essay (where we identified a tripartite structure of Kierkegaard the author, H.H., and the would-be Kierkegaard) we find H.H. as the one who guarantees or conditions the poetic existence of the would-be Kierkegaard.⁷³¹ However, H.H. is dead.⁷³² This I understand as Kierkegaard's deliberate attempts at freeing the would-be Kierkegaard from the confines of fictional existence.⁷³³ On the one hand, H.H. is for Kierkegaard a real figure that transcends him; on the other hand, H.H. is an immanent projection of

⁷³⁰ Stokes, *Kierkegaard's Mirrors*, p. 90.

⁷³¹ I argue similarly to Barrett that H.H. is the author of the introduction to the essay who foreshadows the narrative of the main part of it. H.H. is probably the editor of the narrative in the main part of the essay. From the introduction I derive a different description of the H.H. from Barrett's. I argue that H.H. is serious, speaks out of personal experience, has a psychological insight in human nature, extends the plot with own reflections, does not use flamboyant language. Cf. Burgess, "Kierkegaard, Moravian Missions, and Martyrdom," p. 177 and pp. 182-5. The familiarity of H.H. with the Moravian community could be assumed upon the reference to the picture of horror, presented in the introduction, that was typical for Moravian communities; see also Andrew Burgess, "Kierkegaard's Taler: Moravian Reden," *Acta Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 4, 2009, p. 210.

⁷³² Kierkegaard himself provides a remarkable venture point on H.H. in his Journals about the *Two Essays* and H.H. Cf. Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 242 (SKS 22, 405 f., NB14:102): "Peter came down in December. He...directed his remarks against R. Nielsen and a certain H.H. At the point I told him that I myself am H.H. He was somewhat stunned by that, for he very likely had not read much of the little book, fully convinced that it was not by me. So he wrote up the address. He dealt very briefly with H.H. and also observed that he certainly had a remarkable similarity to S.K."

⁷³³ Cf. Barrett, "Kierkegaard on the Problem of Witnessing while Yet Being a Sinner," pp. 143-6. In his essay Barrett describes H.H. as "the poet" whose role is limited to the introduction of the "fictional author." H.H. is not really existentially engaged with the question of the essay, but rather gives indifferent "meta observations about the resolution" that happened in the life of the man, which "betokens an absence of resolution" in his own life. I offer an opposite account.

Kierkegaard's self.⁷³⁴ Kierkegaard is aware that he must be very strict in his self-assessment, as it can be very self-deceptive to claim things for which one cannot stand.⁷³⁵ For Kierkegaard, such a situation, in which he would dare to claim what it means to be a Christian—what he actually claims when we look at H.H. and Anti-Climacus as imaginative authors—would “produce only aesthetical circumstances” and “aesthetic situation[s],” because an actual life must be lived out, “truth must suffer persecution” and, for now, Kierkegaard is not yet a martyr. By “killing” H.H., Kierkegaard liberates the would-be Kierkegaard from the limitations of a (fictional) narrative. Consequently, he secures his textual existence, the manifestations of which we noticed in the account of narrative formation of the fictional self of the martyr-guerrilla.

I now turn to Ricoeur's concept of the “mimetic arc,” to shed some light on the narrative formation of the self I find in Kierkegaard. My main goal here is to show that Ricoeur's account of the mimetic in fiction helps us in understanding Kierkegaard's peculiar relationship *to* and *with* his own texts, which entails imagination and a new understanding of the reader, and has a transformative effect on the being of the actual existing individual. In that sense *by* means of text, *mimesis* governs and effects the becoming of the self.

A mimetic arc is a mode represented in a three-fold process of “figuration” that relates the understanding of personal identity strictly to narrative representation of human actions. The three parts of the arc are “prefiguration,” “configuration,” and “refiguration.” Narrative identity is built by various stories, and thus there is no meta-narrative that could ultimately define the experience of an individual. Ricoeur says, “what certain fictions redescribe is, precisely, human action itself. [T]he first way human beings attempt to understand and to master the ‘manifold’ of the practical field

⁷³⁴ See Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, p. 4: “The mediator is imaginary, but not the mediation.” What is of importance here is to notice that H.H. mediates an idea that is true, and its status is different from the status of H.H. The would-be Kierkegaard is the actualization of the construct of the martyr. The would-be Kierkegaard is not the actualization of the H.H., because H.H. is dead.

⁷³⁵ Obviously, the aesthetic “solution” to that forms Kierkegaard's conspicuous presentation of oneself in what I term as the negative model in Chapter Three. An account of it's existential, practical and actual, dimension will be offered in the following part in this chapter in the discussion of the existential concepts of redoubling, reduplication and double-reflection. In this context see a journal entry: Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 3, p. 699, entry 3668 (SKS 21, 16, NB6:13): “Reduplication is the essentially Christian...From the Christian point of view, the question is constantly raised not only of the Christian truth of what one says but also of the how of the one who says it.”

is to give themselves a fictive representation of it.”⁷³⁶ One of Ricoeur’s commentators says:

“Fiction refigures the world by enabling us to see it, and ourselves, in new ways. The world of the text only encounters the real world when the text is read. Reading mediates the fictive world of the text and the actual world of the reader; it is a privileged place where the text’s possible world intersects with the actual world.”⁷³⁷

In his philosophy, Ricoeur introduces the concept of “refiguration,” as “the revelatory transformative power exercised by narrative configurations,”⁷³⁸ which is the textual construction with which the reader approaches the text. This concept allows the reader to apply those “narrative configurations” in an actual human life. As a reader of his own texts, Kierkegaard is able to become what he “projects” in narrative⁷³⁹ according to his interpretation of the text.⁷⁴⁰ He attains himself by the passion⁷⁴¹ (which for Girard stands for desire) of becoming the would-be Kierkegaard. Such a hermeneutic surmounts the distance between the text and its interpreter. The mimetic function that one can detect in the “refiguration” is first and foremost the act of application that follows the interpretation⁷⁴²—an idea that is also present in Ferreira’s and Rasmussen’s accounts of imitation as a performative act of actualization and embodiment, discussed in Chapter One.

By virtue of the power of the mimetic, Kierkegaard creates the plot for the would-be Kierkegaard and such a plot generates the figure that, in the Aristotelian sense of imitation, has its features perfected by the forces of imagination. This perfection separates itself from the textual structures and in so doing gains a certain kind of independence.⁷⁴³ The link between the “configuration” of a poetic composition and that of reading indicates the transition within the narrative arc from

⁷³⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, transl. by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1991, p. 176.

⁷³⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990, pp. 98-9.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁹ Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 104.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 103: “To be human is to have a passion for the possible.”

⁷⁴² Cf. Dan R. Stiver, *Theology After Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology*, Louisville: John Knox Press 2001, especially chapter “A Hermeneutical Arc,” pp. 56-79.

⁷⁴³ Cf. Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 55: “[T]he essence of poetic mimesis is...determined by its imaginary aspect, through which its products detach themselves from reality and achieve autonomy.”

narrative “configuration” to “refiguration.” Kierkegaard, as the first reader of the text, gains capacity to finish the process of mimetic hermeneutics and to reduplicate in his real life the set of experiences derived from the text. As Schweiker puts it, “Existence is the troubled attempt to reduplicate in life what is passionately held to be true.”⁷⁴⁴

Kierkegaard as a reader is not the same as Kierkegaard as an author. With respect to Kierkegaard as an author, we cannot get to know much from “his” essay, since H.H. is the author of that work. As Iben Damgaard notes: “Reading is a dialog with the concepts and possibilities that are ‘captured’ in the text and their ‘release’ depends on the reader’s response.”⁷⁴⁵ The reader’s response provides the scope for the real distance between thought and existence, but it is also a means to bridge it. Kierkegaard’s response ought to be realization within his existence of the idea of the would-be Kierkegaard, *aka* the martyr.

If such an interpretation of the essay is correct, one might read Kierkegaard as wanting to become a martyr in a more than just a poetic way. Although, as he claims elsewhere, that “[he does] have the right to present something like this,”⁷⁴⁶ ultimately, Kierkegaard does not want to just hold on to this poetic possibility of himself, but rather he endeavours to existentially interpret it. While this pseudonymous work made Kierkegaard “nearly forget his own name,”⁷⁴⁷ he concludes that the problem it represents must “be discussed...directly and in my own name, directly declaring: This is my life.”⁷⁴⁸ This tension between poetic and actual existence and the issue of translating a prescribed ideal of life into reality (which I have also identified through reading the essay from the perspective of Girard’s mimetic desire) seems to be more than just the key problem of this work; rather it is *the* conundrum running through his authorship.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁴ Schweiker, *Mimetic Reflections*, p. 144.

⁷⁴⁵ Iben Damgaard, “Kierkegaard’s Rewriting of Biblical Narratives: The Mirror of the Text,” *Kierkegaard and the Bible*, t. I, *The Old Testament*, *Kierkegaard Research. Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 1 ed. by Lee C. Barrett and Jon Stewart, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2010, p. 223.

⁷⁴⁶ SKS 22, 27, NB11:33 (quoted after Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 234). “Poetically I certainly do have the right to present something like this; and if in other respects it is the case that my own life has some similarity to it, then it certainly is modesty to present such a thing poetically instead of claiming to be that. It is immodesty for a person to present himself as being more than he is; modesty is just to present in a poetical piece what he perhaps actually is.”

⁷⁴⁷ SKS 22, 30, NB11:40 (quoted after Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 237); cf. SKS 22, 29, NB11:38 and SKS K22, 47.

⁷⁴⁸ SKS 22, 28, NB11:35 (quoted after Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 235).

⁷⁴⁹ This idea seems to be reinforced by Kierkegaard’s consideration of that essay as the key (*Nøglen*) to the production as a whole. See: Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 6, p. 181ff, entry 6447 (SKS 22, 152, NB12:12).

My analyses of the essay from the perspective of Girard's mimetic desire demonstrated that the work offers an account of Kierkegaard's becoming as taking place both in the real world but also in his textual representations of his own self in the would-be Kierkegaard. I have shown that Kierkegaard, as an image maker first creates an image of himself fitted with particular character, qualities and yearnings of a follower of Christ, and subsequently seeks to become himself a Christian by imitating that image and its traits and desires.

What I have shown, following Ricoeur's mimetic arc, is that we can understand Kierkegaard "real" life as dependent upon, or mediated through, a textual representation of himself. In that sense, Kierkegaard as an author first configures a thorough fictive representation of his anticipated self. Then, Kierkegaard as a reader engaging in the process of "refiguration," incorporates that textual representation of himself into his own "real self." In this way, writing and reading is a process of self-understanding, encapsulating oneself, and self-formation that is stretched between two worlds: the actual and the fictive.⁷⁵⁰

2. Self-Formation in the World

So far I have demonstrated that the understanding of *mimesis* as a transformative and life-forming force is embedded in Kierkegaard's autobiographical and non-autobiographical texts. The idea was that by applying the theory of narrative formation and Girard's and Ricoeur's mimetic theories into Kierkegaard's texts, we can bring to light certain implied mimetic structures from these works. As I have shown, these structures are dynamic, and this means that they contribute to the process of the formation of the self. The main goal of this section is to show that the transformative dimension of *mimesis* is not just implied in Kierkegaard's authorship, but it is indeed an integral part of his philosophy, especially his anthropology. This is to say that read against the backdrop of the above-discussed textually conceived mimetic environment of the self, which in a sense is external to self, Kierkegaard's self is intrinsically mimetic in its very structure. This is so because its mode of being and becoming entails transformative *mimesis* at the core of its "configuration." Moreover, the concepts of redoubling, reduplication, and double reflection are

⁷⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 64 (SKS 11, 70). "This is how I understand it, and this is how I understand myself in believing."

undeniably mimetic notions, no less important than following after, and their accurate understanding gets us closer to the more comprehensible account of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard.

I will structure the exposition of these claims as following. First, I will briefly outline an understanding of *mimesis* as a transformative power utilized in both representing and transforming the reality it represents—a rendering that imbued the air breathed by the intellectuals known to Kierkegaard.⁷⁵¹ Opening with a consideration of Aristotle’s *mimesis* as “the capacity to produce *plot*, *intrigue*, or *fable*,”⁷⁵² I then turn to Paul Ricoeur’s appraisal of *mimesis*. There I briefly outline the structure of mimetic narrative, which links together the author, the text and the reader.

Following that exposition, I will dedicate some of my investigation to *mimesis* of action in Kierkegaard, showing its existential, and therefore transformational, dimension. In this context I will examine Kierkegaard’s existential categories of redoubling, reduplication, double reflection, and (to some extent) repetition and indirect communication, all categories often overlooked in this context. As I will show, these mimetic and existential categories, which allow us to understand the link between the participants of narrative discourse (an author, a narrative, a reader) with the narratively structured world, are intrinsically based on, or incorporate in themselves, (the idea of) transformation.

A. Aristotle, Ricoeur and *mimesis* of transformation

Apart from the already discussed Platonic legacy, the major contribution to the discussion of *mimesis* among the Romantics was the understanding of the phenomenon coined in the Aristotelian tradition.⁷⁵³ Consequently, the two ways of utilizing *mimesis*, and their variations that are widely present in the philosophical and aesthetic discussions of Kierkegaard’s contemporaries are imagery/representational (Platonic) and dynamic/of action (Aristotelian).⁷⁵⁴ Contrary to Plato, Aristotle believed that *mimesis* should surpass mimicry in its representational meaning, be it

⁷⁵¹ Burwick, *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections*, p. 80.

⁷⁵² Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 55.

⁷⁵³ Burwick, *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections*, p. 79.

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50. “Both of these principal concepts of *mimesis*—imitation of ideal form, imitation of the processes of thought—were current in the romantic period. Indeed, several romantic philosophers endeavoured to combine them.”

faultless or imperfect. So comprehended, *mimesis* should aim at representing states of action, not just mere objects.⁷⁵⁵

Plato expected artists in their production to ultimately direct the attention of the viewers away from the particular toward the universal, which were considered the perfect beings. Aristotle's disagreement with Plato's ontology orients his rendering of *mimesis* away from a focus solely on imagery and the visual.⁷⁵⁶ Thus, Aristotle's understanding of *mimesis* has two dimensions: It is used in the sense of producing images (Platonic influence) and in the sense of creating a fable or a plot.⁷⁵⁷ For Aristotle, the very act of imitation has three aspects, and the artist in his act of imitation always exemplifies one of these three modes of representation:

“The poet being an imitator, like a painter or any other artist, must of necessity imitate one of three objects, --things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be.”⁷⁵⁸

Hence, art so rendered diverts from adequate presentation of the object intended, but rather focuses on representation that is not limited to mere reproduction.⁷⁵⁹ In representing objects, a poet does not just make them present by how they appear, but more by what they are, revealing their essences and the relations between them.⁷⁶⁰ In a sense, art production gets in between what is, and what can be; it is based on the “principle of probability and necessity.”⁷⁶¹ Such a synthesis can be explained in the fact that “art and poetry aim much more at ‘beautifying’ and ‘improving’ individual features, at *universalization*. Mimesis is thus copying and changing in one.”⁷⁶²

On top of what has been stated about Aristotle's concept of *mimesis*— that it is a complex phenomenon that aims at representing, perfecting and demonstrating the relations between things—it is important to point out that *mimesis* concerns action.

⁷⁵⁵ Arne Melberg, *Theories of Mimesis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995, pp. 43-5.

⁷⁵⁶ Garry Hagberg, “Aristotle's ‘Mimesis’ and Abstract Art,” *Philosophy*, vol. 59, no. 229, 1984, p. 366.

⁷⁵⁷ Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, p. 53.

⁷⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. and transl. by Samuel. H. Butcher, London and New York: Macmillan 1898, 1460b; pp. 96-7.

⁷⁵⁹ Hagberg, “Aristotle's ‘Mimesis’ and Abstract Art,” p. 366. “Imitation, for Aristotle, involves not merely physical resemblance, but also what one might call generally the relations between things or the ‘mechanisms’ of things.”

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 368.

⁷⁶¹ Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*, p 54.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*

Although the medium that comprehensively addresses those qualities is tragedy,⁷⁶³ imitation is the most natural thing for human beings to do. Children learn by imitation, and in imitating they do what they see adults do.⁷⁶⁴

The details of Aristotle's account of *mimesis* as action is a highly debatable topic, and one of which I cannot provide an extensive account here. However, my understanding of the issue follows the one offered by S. H. Butcher, who interprets the problem in a very multifaceted and broad way. Among the fundamental aspects of *mimesis* of action Butcher enumerates the following features:

external process or result [linked with] inward process, a psychological energy working outwards [and] everything that expresses the mental life, that reveals a rational personality, ...mental processes, spiritual movements;...in a word, all that constitutes the inward and essential activity of a soul.⁷⁶⁵

Burwick reinforces that rendering of the notion in question by adding that the mental action involved in the mimetic activity must produce physical action.⁷⁶⁶ *Mimesis* in Aristotle is then an active phenomenon that originates in the inwardness of an individual and has its expression outward in both representing and altering. An imitator aims at representing outwardly what he or she conceives of the object to be represented, and thus in effect transforms the conceived object into its perfected possibility.

The Aristotelian appraisal of *mimesis*, as creative and interpretative representation, is the undercurrent of Ricoeur's hermeneutics. It bears a strong resemblance with Ricoeur's concept of "refiguration," which, as I will argue, corresponds with Kierkegaard's existential concepts of redoubling and double-reflection. As was noted in the previous part of this chapter, following Ricoeur, a text "redescribes" action, which means that it arranges different events into a coherent

⁷⁶³ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450a; pp. 28-9. "Thus Tragedy is the imitation of an action, and of the agents mainly with a view to the action."

⁷⁶⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448b, pp. 14-5.

⁷⁶⁵ Samuel H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, with a Critical Text and a Translation of the Poetics*, New York: Dover Publications, 1951, p. 123.

⁷⁶⁶ Burwick, *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections*, p. 79. "Furthermore, *mimesis*, as 'the representation of human action,' must reveal mental action as well as physical. Aristotle's concept of imitation, then, involves an act of deliberately choosing, a psychological process in which a character responds to a situation and considers alternatives. His physical action must be seen as the outcome of his mental action." See also p. 50. "The playwright must reveal the motives and the movement, the predications of actions in thought (*dianoia*): a character must respond, deliberate, and choose (Poetics 1449b36-14450b15)."

narrative, and the aim for the hermeneut is to interpret them, which means enact them in real life. The hermeneutic process is not merely related to, but completed in, action. As we observed in the previous section, this is problematic for Kierkegaard, since the poetic representations of his self are *not* “identical” with their existential incorporation into life.

What Schweiker observes in his account of Kierkegaard’s *mimesis*⁷⁶⁷ is that the Dane’s authorship can be read as a plethora of possible structures of human selves that demand “refiguration” in real life. This *mimesis* of the self is possible because Kierkegaard’s selves in their very makeup allow for being configured in a text. “Existence is the hermeneutic of the truth,”⁷⁶⁸ says Schweiker, which means that the truth must be lived out, otherwise it is not what it appears to be. Following that, what Ricoeur expects from the reader engaging with a narrative discourse is an appropriation of the world of possibilities given in the text. This appropriation changes and transforms the reader and their world because it transforms possibilities into existence, thus has the existential dimension.

B. Kierkegaard: redoubling, reduplication and double-reflection as structures of/for transformation

In the previous section, I outlined Aristotelian and Ricouerian understandings of *mimesis*, as dynamic, interpretative, and demanding action, and noted that they can be found in Kierkegaard’s theory of human becoming. In this section I will show that especially Ricoeur’s theory of figuration corresponds with not only the Dane’s concepts of redoubling, reduplication and double-reflection, but also with repetition and indirect communication. I will argue these existential categories are constructions that first, provoke narrative configuring and, second, make possible the hermeneutic interpretation in action.⁷⁶⁹ Putting it differently, these existential categories link the producer of a narrative with its reader, and allow the reader to interpret, and therefore

⁷⁶⁷ See also an account of Schweiker’s rendering of imitation in Chapter One.

⁷⁶⁸ Schweiker, *Mimetic Reflections*, p. 168.

⁷⁶⁹ See Rebecca Skaggs’ usage of “individual appropriation” in the context of Kierkegaard’s existential hermeneutics in her informative article “Kierkegaard’s Hermeneutic,” *HeyJ*, vol. 55, Issue 5, 2014, pp. 817–26, especially pp. 817–20.

to appropriate the world of the mediated narratives; and, consequently, to experience qualitative change within them and their world.⁷⁷⁰

As was noted in the first part of this chapter, Kierkegaard displays a certain veneration for the genre of confession, as it allows one to express oneself in the world of text but also exposes oneself to the scrutiny of public eye. Confession is therefore a medium that transforms what could be perceived as a disinterested quasi-communication into what is of (absolute) interest to an individual and demands responsibility. As mentioned, Augustine's and Rousseau's confessions make the authors accountable in different ways; the former is accountable, by and large, before God and the latter before the other and oneself.

While certainly contestable, there is an argument that Kierkegaard prefer Augustine's mode of confession to that of Rousseau. This approach draws on the fact that Rousseau's type of accountability before the other ultimately means sanctioning its opposite: leniency and what the Dane calls, "levelling." Moreover, crucially, Kierkegaard finds in the Great Church Father's work something that is "almost never seen" among other authors, namely reduplication [*Reduplikationen*]. Kierkegaard, "I really do not know one single religious author (except perhaps Augustine) who actually reduplicates his thought."⁷⁷¹ This thought, which is initially expressed as words of criticism of the ordinary churchgoers of the Danish Lutheran Church, is followed by another remark on the clergyman who, preaching about the cost of discipleship, "is a rogue who flatters his vanity by imagining himself persecuted out here in rural peace and security."⁷⁷² At the core of Kierkegaard's notion of reduplication lies simultaneously a certain duality and a call to some kind of unity.

The unity of the life and the "preaching" of Augustine is here juxtaposed with the lack of it in the lives of the clergy and the churchgoer, both entertaining imagination instead of real existence. The qualitative superiority of the former pertains to coherence in life, being in touch with and having control over one's own existence. Considering the etymology of the Greek word "*autheneo*," which encompasses these characteristics, Kierkegaard judges the life of the Bishop of Hippo as indeed authentic.

⁷⁷⁰ Schweiker, *Mimetic Reflections*, p.137. "The value of narrative is that by its very nature it links the temporal, active, and linguistic dimension of human existence."

⁷⁷¹ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 3, p. 699, entry 3667 (SKS 20, 418, NB5:117).

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 699, entry 3668 (SKS 21, 16, NB6:13).

Following the argument of the preceding section, we might suggest that Augustine is as he emplots himself. The churchgoer and the clergyman cannot, or merely do not, want to interpret the narrative they have created by refraining from and deferring refiguration of the world of possibilities into their life and world. They rest satisfied having merely poetized selves, following Rasmussen. Here, the “[r]eduplication in existing and action”⁷⁷³ in the decisive here-and-now of Augustine is contrasted with the “[a]t present I do not...but after a while” of the churchgoer and the “you do not know at what moment you must suffer for the truth” of the “man-in-silk.” They are content to exist in certain duality. Moreover, it seems that only Augustine here is accountable to his word(s), self and world, by translating possibility into existence.

Reduplication, redoubling, and double-reflection, but also repetition and indirect communication, are Kierkegaard’s mimetic categories of transformation that allow for coming into existence. At first glance, these concepts lack any obvious commonality. Nevertheless, as will be shown presently, each involves the exercise of accountability, interest, action and transformation, and each entails the aforementioned dialectical pair of unity-duality. It is worth first noting the general mimetic quality already embedded in them, which is characterized by a specific mimetic “doubleness” or “twofoldness.” A duplicate is already a copy of something else, and so to re-duplicate a duplicate is a highly imitative undertaking, which suggests that one is departing further away from the original. So too with double-reflection: if we take reflection as a semblance of something else, double-reflection is a reflection of a reflection. Similarly, redoubling suggests that a double, which is already an increase (a development or a reproduction of something), is re-doubled, which means multiplied on a larger scale. The case of indirect communication provides an analogous example. Communication requires two, not one, and as such it makes a monologue into a dialogue. Moreover, Kierkegaard links two understanding of communication - direct and indirect -which stand in a relationship qualified by *mimesis*. It is so since we cannot understand these types of communication without considering their mutual relationship.

It is important to notice that all these highly mimetic concepts are fundamental to Kierkegaard’s theory of existence. In turn, this shows that *mimesis* is at stake both

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 700, entry 3672 (SKS 21, 185, NB8:99). Translation modified. “[I] Reduplicationen i at existere og handle.”

in Kierkegaard's ethical-religious and aesthetic production. This is to say that looking at the very structure of his theory of human becoming one should see a particular dialectic of Kierkegaard's authorship that holds in tension the aesthetic with the existential.

The goal of this section is to demonstrate a remarkable relationship between these categories. The common ground I find among them all is *mimesis* - comprehended in Aristotelian-Ricoeurian way - as a phenomenon that involves perfection and demands action. For the clarity of argumentation, presentation of these categories will be arranged around their associations with redoubling and reduplication.

The major considerations of redoubling, reduplication, double reflection, repetition and indirect communication occur in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings and his journals. The concepts of repetition and redoubling are first encountered in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous work *Repetition [Gjentagelse]*.⁷⁷⁴ The association of the eponymous main concept of this work with redoubling occurs in two of the "Letters from the Young Man" to "[His] Silent Confidant." Redoubling there is related to Job's blessing in receiving everything double except the life of his children.⁷⁷⁵ The true repetition of the spirit is juxtaposed in contradiction with the repetition of worldly possessions.⁷⁷⁶ Redoubling is associated with the former type of repetition. Another entry regarding redoubling and repetition appears in Johannes Climacus's work, *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*.⁷⁷⁷ In this context repetition is presented as relating to both certain ideality and reality. The Young Man of the book cannot repeat because—as Constantin Constantius affirms—he is in ideality: He let the girl go some time ago, and now he is coming back and she is married. He treated her in the world of the ideal—or the fantastic—but she is married in the realm of the real. The author himself visits Berlin again, and he notices that he cannot discover that city again; it has been already discovered. In a similar manner Job's children are dead; to bring them back Job can only recollect (if it is possible). The true repetition takes place in the realm that transcends temporality and eternity, or reality and ideality—in the spirit.

⁷⁷⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling, Repetition*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1983, p. 212 and p. 221 (SKS 4, 79 and 88).

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 221 (SKS 4, 88). "Only his children did Job not receive double [*dobbelt*] again, for human life cannot be redoubled [*fordoble*] that way. Here only repetition of the spirit is possible...which is the true repetition."

⁷⁷⁶ Cf. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 3, p. 707f, entry 3687 (SKS 24, 244, NB23:73).

⁷⁷⁷ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 181 (SKS 15, 58). "Here is redoubling [*Fordobling*]; here is a matter of repetition [*Gjentagelse*]."

It is important to notice that repetition spans in itself a certain duality, which is reality and ideality. As I will show later in this section, this duality is characteristic of not just repetition, but also of redoubling, reduplication and double reflection. Here I agree with Roe Fremstedal in his “Anthropology in Kierkegaard and Kant,” that these notions “all imply a duality, according to which one first has an idea, or an understanding, which subsequently is realized (repeated or doubled) in action.”⁷⁷⁸ However, my understanding of these concepts is mimetic, which means that they do not necessarily “designate the overcoming of the difference between facticity and ideality,”⁷⁷⁹ thinking and being, understanding or idea and action. This mimetic duality, which one naturally feels contained in their very meaning, is the common ground of all aforementioned concepts.

The first definition of redoubling can be found in another work of Johannes Climacus, *Philosophical Fragments*: “Yet *coming into existence* can contain within itself a redoubling [*Fordobling*], that is a possibility of coming into existence within its own coming into existence.”⁷⁸⁰ Redoubling refers to the double movement of becoming an individual. On the one hand the individual, due to the fact of mere being in the world, has its own historical point of beginning. On the other hand “the more special historical coming into existence comes into existence by way of a relatively freely acting cause, which in turn definitively points to an absolutely freely acting cause,”⁷⁸¹ which is the realm of spirit and the eternal. In *Christian Discourses* Kierkegaard points to the difference between the man and the bird. In redoubling the man has two beginnings: one is his historical existence, while the other arises in the chance of becoming in the eternal way—to be itself before God.⁷⁸²

⁷⁷⁸ Roe Fremstedal, “Anthropology in Kierkegaard and Kant: The Synthesis of Facticity and Ideality vs. Moral Character,” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2011, p. 47. The author does not include double-reflection in his list of concepts that are characterized by duality. “Kierkegaard appears to use the concept repetition to designate the overcoming of the difference between facticity and ideality. Repetition denotes that ideality is realized in reality, that universal (ethical) principles, concepts, or ideas, are realized in actuality. Repetition takes on a range of meanings. It can mean everything from ideality’s being fully realized in reality, to merely realizing an idea through action on the other. Similarly, Kierkegaard’s concepts of doubling (*Fordoblelse*) and reduplication both refer to an idea being realized in reality, that something abstract (e. g. thinking) becomes concrete through action. The concepts of repetition, doubling, and reduplication all imply a duality, according to which one first has an idea, or an understanding, which subsequently is realized (repeated or doubled) in action.”

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.* N.B. The author does not explain his precise understanding of “the overcoming of the difference between facticity and ideality.”

⁷⁸⁰ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 76 (SKS 4, 276); italics mine.

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸² Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, p. 41 (SKS 10, 52).

Redoubling is introduced in a discussion that deals with the being and becoming of the truth in the *Postscript*.⁷⁸³ Truth is redoubling when in the relation of adequacy the “is” of the truth is accentuated. Climacus identifies redoubling—which here is an abstract aspect of the truth comprehended in an idealistic manner—with reduplication, saying: “When for existing spirit qua existing spirit there is a question about truth, that abstract reduplication [*Reduplikation*] of truth recurs.”⁷⁸⁴ The true reduplication is the reduplication of a subject’s thinking in its existence, hence the inward is mimetically expressed in the outward. In the example of the relation between a teacher and a learner Climacus associates reduplication with the inward movement within an individual who wants to grasp the truth.⁷⁸⁵

In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard introduces the concept of redoubling to explain his non-preferential love as a spiritual category. However, what has been ignored by scholars is that redoubling shows that non-preferential love entails *mimesis*. To love without preferential scope is to love the other as one’s neighbour, for “[t]he concept ‘neighbor’ is actually the redoubling [*Fordoblelsen*] of your own self.”⁷⁸⁶ Redoubling signifies a change within the individual’s spirit according to which the individual renounces loving preferentially those who are close to him (family, beloved, friend) on account of loving others as oneself. On the one hand, the redoubling qualification of love allows it to avoid the fate of objectification, as redoubling itself is a spiritual category.⁷⁸⁷ On the other hand, in the light of redoubling, loving the other has a mimetic dimension; the other becomes a redoubled self to which the one has a duty. To love oneself is to love the other.⁷⁸⁸

Moreover, non-preferential love encompasses the pair duality-unity and calls for “refiguring” action as redoubling links the outward and the inward of the existential in an individual by expressing outwardly what he held as true inwardly in the individual.⁷⁸⁹ “[T]he one who loves is or becomes what he does.”⁷⁹⁰ In other

⁷⁸³ First encounters with reduplication take place in Kierkegaard, *Stages on the Life’s Way*, p. 65 and p. 427 (SKS 6, 65 and 395).

⁷⁸⁴ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 191f (SKS 7, 176).

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 333 (SKS 7, 304).

⁷⁸⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1995, p. 21 / SKS 9, 29. Here redoubling follows the thread from Kierkegaard’s *Stages on Life’s Way*, where it was associated with difference between the erotic and spiritual characteristic of individual. The person who loves erotically “can by no means bear redoubling [*Fordoblelsen*].”

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁸ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p. 182 (SKS 9, 182). “[L]ove is a redoubling [*Fordoblelse*] in itself,”

⁷⁸⁹ Cf. Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 99 (SKS 11, 103).

words, in love one loving expresses that he is in love. The love of the neighbor is not just a pure concept; on the contrary it is executed in action. The ideality of love is “repeated” and becomes reality.

An imperfect human being can be either an imaginary being like a mathematical idea—not having the difference in itself—or can be just a “vanishing being” having the difference outside itself.⁷⁹¹ Conversely, “the being of righteousness has this perfection, that it contains a redoubling [*Fordoblelse*]; this redoubling that it contains in itself is the difference between right and wrong.”⁷⁹² The righteous being is righteous because this is its inner characteristic—the characteristic of its spirit—and because his actions represent (redouble) righteousness. Righteousness is expressed in choosing between right and wrong and therefore resembles what has been declared of “Aristotle’s concept of imitation, [that it] involves an act of deliberating choosing, a psychological process in which a character responds to a situation and considers alternatives.”⁷⁹³

In Anti-Climacus’s *Practice in Christianity* both redoubling and reduplication reappear (predominantly) in context of indirect communication. It can be formed in two ways; the difference between them lies in the relation between “the communication and the communicator.”⁷⁹⁴ When the communicator is absent from the communication as a subject—the “communicator is a zero, a nonperson, an objective something”⁷⁹⁵—the redoubling of communication is present in the unity of opposites: communication is of the subjective, but the communicator is a disinterested medium.⁷⁹⁶ The other way is when the “communicator is the reduplication [*Redupplikationen*] of the communication” and therefore is present as subject in the communication.⁷⁹⁷

Redoubling and reduplication serve in exposing the qualitative difference between the thought of the individual and its action. Indirect communication that is possible through redoubling and reduplication is the proper way of communicating

⁷⁹⁰ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p. 281 (SKS 9, 279).

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹² Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, p. 208 (SKS 10, 217).

⁷⁹³ Burwick, *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections*, p. 79

⁷⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, p. 134 (SKS 12, 137).

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133 (SKS 12, 137).

⁷⁹⁶ Cf. *Pap. X-5 B 234* (translation following Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 263).

⁷⁹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, p. 133 and 123 (SKS 12, 137 and 128). “[T]he reduplication [*Redupplikationen*] lies in precisely this, that the teacher is integral...through his existing in what he teaches.”

the eternal truth. Indirect communication and redoubling comprise mental consideration and action expressed in a choice, and therefore as such are to be understood as mimetic concepts in the sense of Aristotelian-Ricoeurian *mimesis*. However, direct communication is also mimetic; for example, a martyr is a direct communicator of martyrdom as one “refigures” in the real world “prefigured-configured” idea of sacrifice so comprehended.

Double-reflection is another of Kierkegaard’s mimetic concepts I would like to concentrate on in this section. This notion is used by the Dane to elaborate the already discussed concept of indirect communication and the subjective thinker, both notions deeply expressing the transformative and mimetic dimension of Kierkegaard’s authorship. In the *Postscript*, Climacus says:

“The form of a communication is something different from the expression of a communication. When a thought has gained its proper expression in the world, which is attained through the first reflection, there comes the second reflection, which bears upon the intrinsic relation of the communication to the communicator and renders the existing communicator’s own relation to the idea.”⁷⁹⁸

Here the first reflection addresses the relation between the expressed thought and its accurateness. It concerns certain truths or convictions, for example: “truth is inwardness.”⁷⁹⁹ The second reflection addresses two relations. The first relation occurs between the communicator and the form of the communication. The second relation appears between the communicator and his or her relation to the truth that is being expressed in the communication.

Another account of double-reflection is presented in the context of indirect communication, where Kierkegaard uses the concept to illustrate his understanding of communication: “[A]ll communication must go through a double reflection; the first [reflection] is the reflection in which the communication is made, and the second [reflection] is that in which it is recaptured.”⁸⁰⁰ At this point, the first reflection is presented as the sphere that links the communicator and the communicated thought; it functions as a platform that allows the content of the reflection to occur. In the second

⁷⁹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 76 (SKS 7, 77).

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77 (SKS 7, 77).

⁸⁰⁰ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 274, entry 649 (SKS 27, 397; Papir 365:14).

reflection the communicator reflects over the reflecting, because he reflects over the first reflection. It seems that in the first reflection there is an object that is the content of the reflection. The first reflection is, however, the content of the second reflection. Kierkegaard adds: “Double-reflection is already implicit in the idea of communication itself,”⁸⁰¹ but the “secret of communication specifically hinges on setting the other free, for that very reason he [the communicator] must not communicate himself directly...”⁸⁰²

Double-reflection focuses on the ethical form of communication that addresses the relation between the communicator and the receiver.⁸⁰³ Double-reflection keeps the communication between individuals on the level that exceeds the “ordinary communication”⁸⁰⁴ between people, which takes place in the immediate. Double-reflection characterizes an individual’s communication that refers to the eternal dimension of life, and treats the individual as “continually [being] in the process of becoming.”⁸⁰⁵ Through the employment of double-reflection, the outward expression of the communicated idea impacts the receiver of the communication, securing the otherness of the receiver. The communicator is not God (master-teacher); therefore he is not supposed to directly teach a receiver. The receiver already has the knowledge in herself, and should be led to confront her master-teacher. Double reflection aims at the transformation of the receiver by opening for her possibilities of complete being.

In indirect communication, through double-reflection, the communicator redoubles its being. He is both a teacher and a learner. Reduplication occurs in the double-reflection. What the communicator holds as true must resonate in his or her existence, as the communicator does not communicate disinterested thoughts.⁸⁰⁶ Consequently, such understood double-reflection engaged in indirect communication results in the qualitative change—transformation—within both ends of the communication action.

The communicator communicates in certain duplexity: that is, “existing in the isolation of inwardness, [he] wants to communicate himself...[and] simultaneously

⁸⁰¹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 73 (SKS 7, 74).

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 74 (SKS 7, 74f).

⁸⁰³ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 269-71, entry 649 (SKS 27, 32; Papir 365:5-7).

⁸⁰⁴ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 74 (SKS 7, 74).

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73 (SKS 7, 74).

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80 (SKS 7, 80). “Just as his communication must in form essentially conform to his own existence, so his thought must correspond to the form of existence.”

wants to keep his thinking in the inwardness of his subjective existence...⁸⁰⁷ Hence, double-reflection is linked with the concept of redoubling and reduplication⁸⁰⁸ that is expressed as “duplexity [*Dobbelthed*] of thought-existence.”⁸⁰⁹ Contrary to the objective thinker, the subjective existing thinker is ultimately interested in his thinking, because his thinking is part of the process of his becoming. The objective thinker is existentially disinterested in what he communicates, and consequently his dispassionate relation to what is being communicated leaves his subject turned into an object. “In thinking [the subjective thinker] thinks the universal, but, as existing in this thinking, as acquiring his inwardness, he becomes more and more subjectively isolated.”⁸¹⁰ In proper communication, which is indirect communication, the communicator—the subjective thinker as existing—“is essentially interested in his own thinking, [as he] is existing in it... [H]is thinking has another kind of reflection,...that of inwardness, of possession.”⁸¹¹

Double-reflection characterizes the dialectic of existence. The dialectic of existence can be expressed only in indirect communication that respects its dialectic character.⁸¹² The dialectic of existence contains in itself its positivity and negativity that can be comprehended in the subject through/in double-reflection. The positivity in the subject is not the certainty of earthly life.⁸¹³ It is related to the subject’s negativity; the positivity is the awareness of the negativity of the subject, which is its existence that refers to contradiction of “the infinite in his soul”⁸¹⁴ and the perpetual process of becoming. “[H]is positivity consist in the continued inward deepening in which he is cognizant of the negative.”⁸¹⁵ The relation between the positive and negative in the subject is expressed in the relation between the comic and the pathos in it. The subjective existing thinker’s relation to the comic and pathos is regulated by the fact of the thinker’s existing in double-reflection.⁸¹⁶ For ordinary people the communication must be either pathos-filled or comic, or if both are incorporated in

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73 (SKS 7, 73).

⁸⁰⁸ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 286-8, entry 453 (SKS 27, 397; Papir 365: 12-7).

⁸⁰⁹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 73 (SKS 7, 73f).

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁸¹² Kierkegaard, *The Corsair Affair*, ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna. H. Hong, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1982, p., 44 (SKS 14, 83). “Existential dialectic, especially in the form of double-reflection, cannot be communicated directly.”

⁸¹³ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 86 (SKS 7, 86).

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81-4 (SKS 7, 81-4).

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 84 (SKS 7, 84).

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87 (SKS 7, 87).

the communication, either pathos or the comic must dominate. “But for the person existing in double-reflection, the proportion is this: just as much of pathos, just as much of the comic.”⁸¹⁷ The indirect communication contains the double-reflection that is expressed in a certain deception (signifying that the communicator first and foremost does not seem to be an earnest man) that unites the religious and the jest: “The dialectical in that the communicator must work against himself.”⁸¹⁸ What the thinker says may sound like a jest, but in fact it may be the highest earnestness.⁸¹⁹

Kierkegaard sees the complexity of his enterprise—his pseudonymous and signed works—as expressing the dialectical existence of the author. Because Kierkegaard perceives his authorship as the art of communication, therefore he sees himself existing in the dialectic of double-reflection.⁸²⁰ Understanding double-reflection in this context of the art of communication helps explain why Kierkegaard refers to his pseudonymous works as a “doubly reflected communication.”⁸²¹

Rendered this way, the authorship also links double-reflection with reduplication in a way that reinforces the understanding of *mimesis* as transformation—the central subject of this chapter. Furthermore, it testifies to this peculiar relationship between the author, the text and the reader discussed earlier and the hermeneutic dimension of the text succinctly expressed by Vincent Delacroix:

“the pseudonymous authorship...represents or mimes reduplication...[T]he true reduplication [takes place] inside writing, for if reduplication intrinsically links discourse to the real person, such a person is here the literary figure of the author.”⁸²²

In this chapter, I elaborated an appraisal of Kierkegaard’s *mimesis* as essentially pertaining to his take on human becoming and the self. I demonstrated that his engagement of the concept, rendered as interpretative and demanding action, helps us in understanding particularities of human formation, like self-narration, representation of one’s life in text, and the formative effect of text on life. By appealing to Girard’s and Ricoeur’s mimetic theories, I identified certain mimetic

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 276, entry 649 (*Pap.* VIII-2 B 81).

⁸¹⁹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 88 (*SKS* 7, 88).

⁸²⁰ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 5, p. 306, entry 5865 (*Pap.* VII-1 B 83).

⁸²¹ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, p. 133 (*SKS* 12, 137).

⁸²² Vincent Delecroix, “Final Words: Training in Christianity as a Terminal Writing,” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2010, p. 100.

structures embedded in Kierkegaard's text that configure and transform the self. I demonstrated the mimetic dimension of Kierkegaard's fundamental existential categories of redoubling, reduplication and double-reflection. I argued that the proper understanding of these notions entails a two-fold movement of mimetic transformative hermeneutics that allows one to inhabit the world of possibilities, which devoid of interpretation, linger as mere un-actualized or un-enacted fictional potentialities. Lastly, the notions of the mimetically qualified self, its becoming and environment, will reappear in the following chapter as a fundamental component of a new reading of Kierkegaard's imitation.

V. CHAPTER FIVE: MOVEMENT

In the first chapter, I offered an account of the main readings of Kierkegaard's concept of imitation, which as I noted, is the most discussed aspect of Kierkegaard's engagement of *mimesis* in academia. These interpretations consider Kierkegaard's works both in isolation and in conversation with various cultural phenomena and thinkers of interest, as well as in relation to contemporary philosophical discussions. Most of these readings that intended to give a comprehensive account of Kierkegaard's imitation encounter significant problems, several of which I have tried to identify and address in the opening and the subsequent chapters. Among these challenging matters are the plurality of mimetic models, the overlooked Socratic dimension of Kierkegaard's imitation, the representational and thus the aesthetic dimension of Kierkegaard's religious ideas, and lastly, the emulative and performative nature of human formation.

As the title of this chapter I chose "movement" for two reasons. First, what I would like to cover in it is indeed what movement explicitly and implicitly refers to in Kierkegaard's authorship. The key notions here are development, motion, mechanism, machinery, strategy and deception but also difference, inversion and indirectness and intention. Second, this chapter itself constitutes a certain movement; it is a movement forward qualified by a certain return. In my investigation, I return to and revisit the notion of Kierkegaard's imitation aiming at more a comprehensive and far reaching account of it by taking into account material discussed in preceding chapters.

The main argument of this chapter is that to understand Kierkegaard's imitation we need to read it in the context of his broader engagement with *mimesis*, which is one that sees imitation as necessarily entailing problems of representation, performance and emulation. Consequently, I find it more appropriate to look for Kierkegaard's *mimesis*, than imitation. In that sense I find Kierkegaard's imitation as essentially being part of Kierkegaard's *mimesis*, which, following Schweiker's rendering of Kierkegaard's *mimesis*, I call existential *mimesis*.

In short, Kierkegaard's existential *mimesis* is "non-imitative" (following the understanding of *the Socratic* from Chapter Two) and (as I will elaborate in this chapter) indirect and intention-driven. Furthermore, (drawing upon deliberations on the imitative nature of selfhood from the previous chapter), existential *mimesis* "sees"

the self and its becoming as entailing “refigurative” interaction with imagery/mental representations of oneself and with mimetic models, hence as essentially mimetic.

Yet, focusing at first primarily on Kierkegaard’s imitation, I show that one “benefits” from approaching it as something that is indirect, or even ambiguous, contrary to a rendering of imitation that is close to a detailed copying or mimicking. Such an understanding both opens the reader to a much broader and comprehensive reading of the phenomenon in question—which I ultimately find in the notion of existential *mimesis*—, it also deals with or “accommodates” the above-noticed “problematic issues” and “challenging matters” with Kierkegaard’s imitation.

First, in my exposition of Kierkegaard’s indirect imitation I refer to the notions of second immediacy, comparison and intention. The main thought there is that Kierkegaard stresses two types of mimetic engagements, the negative one, which is an imitation of another human being, and the positive type of imitation, which is the imitation of Christ (essentially related to human becoming, which is the imitation of one’s own ideal as discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four). What scholars have gravely overlooked, an authentic existence simultaneously affirms particularly rendered likeness with Christ and dissimilarity with others. This is succinctly articulated in a journal entry from 1852, a remark on Kierkegaard’s own development in relation to the requirement of the imitation of Christ from 1848, “What must be emphasized is the following [*Efterfølgelse*] of Christ—and I must remain as I am in my unlikeness to others [*Ueensartethed*].”⁸²³ The negative type of imitation is based on the phenomenon of comparison here, which although largely ignored by scholars in the context of imitation, is in fact one of Kierkegaard’s main interests in *mimesis*. Apart from reading Kierkegaard’s imitation as non-imitative, non-comparing and indirect, I propose reading the positive type of imitation as intention-driven, in contrast with imitation that is concerned with a detailed reproduction or copying of an action or object.

Second, I contend Kierkegaard intends imitation as a practice or an undertaking, which to some degree resembles a process of phenomenological reduction that aims at grasping the human in the human against the backdrop of that

⁸²³ Translation following Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, vol. 2, Gloucester Mass: Peter Smith 1970, p. 495f (*SKS* 25, 22; *NB*26:14). “Det der skal anbringes er: Christi Efterfølgelse – og jeg maa være som jeg er i Ueensartethed.” It seems that Lowrie attempts a translation with a small dose of interpretation by rendering “Ueensartethed,” which means heterogeneity, as “unlikeness to others,” the sense of the entry as a whole is being kept here.

which is of the ultimate importance to oneself, one's own being. I invoke in that section the lily and the bird and their teaching of the tripartite of method of practicing silence-obedience-joy.

In the third section, I demonstrate that Kierkegaard's appraisal of human becoming is deeply mimetic, because it entails a procedure of initially creating various images of oneself and subsequently representing them in real life. I argue that he understands these images as a means of seizing and conceptualizing oneself, as such transcending their reflective and imaginary dimensions, that allow for seeing oneself as different than one is, which is an ultimate prerequisite of one's becoming.

Lastly, in the section "Difference-Inversion," I discuss Kierkegaard's revival of the category of difference as entailing relationship between human beings and God and between themselves. Paradoxically, difference and heterogeneity stand in the way of slavish copying others by means of ubiquitous comparison, and allow for indirect imitation of the absolutely different, Christ. By focusing on Kierkegaard's usage of inversion, I identify a poetic mode of communication of that, which should not be understood unequivocally or straightforwardly by a reader, but rather that, of which comprehension requires a new-fangled manner of reasoning. Subsequently, inversion incites the reader to work her way through a text finding what it really says, which is often very different to what we originally think of it.

1. Indirect imitation

The main idea behind this chapter is that the pinnacle of Kierkegaard's engagement of *mimesis* is indirect imitation. I purposely avoid using the well-established terms of "dialectic imitation" and "inverse imitation" for three reasons. First, I see indirect imitation as encompassing a greater array of meanings in Kierkegaard's imitation than has generally been attributed to it, both intended and not so by the Dane. Second, I try to avoid the term dialectics as it has been used by scholars in various ways and contexts that do not take *mimesis* as a crucial point of reference while discussing imitation. The dialectic dimension of Kierkegaard's imitation will nonetheless be (implicitly and explicitly) hinted at in this section. I will also refer to inverse dialectics in the further part of my examination, though as a concept that has its foundation in indirect imitation. Lastly, although conceptually

distinguished from *mimesis*, indirect imitation is in fact the fundamental component of Kierkegaard's existential *mimesis*.

The indirectness of imitation is something we can understand when looking at Kierkegaard's authorship from the perspective of *mimesis*. This perspective does not only reveal a new rendering of the concept in question, but also equips us with means to conceptualize Kierkegaard's imitation as indirect, which denotes that which cannot be grasped in a usual discursive way. The difficulties with some of the previously discussed accounts of Kierkegaard's imitation (especially those begging for a complex reading of the problem, and of Kierkegaard's production as such) is related to the fact that (as was already noted in the first two chapters of this dissertation) the phenomenon in question was, on the one hand read, out of context from its mother concept. On the other hand, the issue was precisely located in the attempt to analyze Kierkegaard's notion of imitation in an unequivocal manner. In essence, what has been overlooked can broadly be understood as a mimetic dimension of imitation, which as such qualifies it as that which cannot be grasped in a usually discursive way.⁸²⁴

This approach to imitation in Kierkegaard, which is marginalizing the mimetic outlook and emphasizing direct conceptualization, becomes evident with various scholarly considerations of Kierkegaard's concept of the "prototype." It also greatly influences the reception of Kierkegaard's imitation of Christ. Answers to the question, "Can we really imitate Christ?" typically presuppose direct imitation and are usually affirmative and negative. More nuanced readings attempted at distinguishing what can and cannot (should and should not) be imitated from Christ directly: redemptive labor of Christ, Christ's ethical deeds, Christ's submission to the Father, suffering, the divinity of Christ, the human nature of Christ, etc. As noted in Chapter One, we are eventually left with no definitive answers to these questions.

In that problematic situation we may have recourse to the derivative prototypes discussed in Chapter Two, which, as it seems, offer a more direct way of imitation because the transcendent sphere of Christ's divinity is off the table. Apostles, for instance, appear as tangible exemplars of the Christian faith, and great patterns for a genuine existence can be found in figures like Augustine or Thomas à Kempis. However, as I have already indicated, Kierkegaard disapproves of the idea of doing

⁸²⁴ See in this regard: "Introduction: Approaching Mimesis," in Potolsky, *Mimesis*, pp. 1-12.

the will of another human being (one's contemporary or not) as this may lead to various aberrations. Such deviations may be learned of in the history of the Church. As we will see further down this chapter, the problem is also that we can never be sure what is the real intention behind the action we are imitating. Additionally, following Girard's mimetic theory, our imitation of others is to a large extent involuntary, unreflective and unconscious. Subsequently, our imitation of an action includes the fact that we imitate some more distant ends of the action than the ones we are aware of. Imitating someone's action we simultaneously imitate his or her desires, according to Girard.

Our last resort is to follow the lilies of the field and the birds in the air as prescribed mimetic models for genuine (Christian) self by the thinker. Yet, that kind of imitation cannot be direct because our nature is incompatible with theirs. It is so because the lily and the bird have no account of inwardness, spirituality and freedom—they are not human beings.

In conclusion, if we seriously take on board these considerations, where neither Christ and the lily and the bird, who are not Christians, and Christians like apostles, martyrs, Church Fathers or Doctors of the Church, and other prominent figures of Christianity, must not be imitated directly according to Kierkegaard on the one hand, and if we consider Kierkegaard's simultaneous insistence upon the imitation of Christ and the fact that it is impossible to complete it, on the other, it seems that a different kind of imitation is at stake for the thinker. I propose we recourse to indirect imitation.

Yet, following what I have presented in Chapter One, the above-stated issues have to be read against imitation understood as a Socratic task. This means that Kierkegaard's notion of human being-becoming is a mimetic assignment, because, on the one hand, we are by nature imitative creatures and we live in a "mimetically immersed" society.⁸²⁵ On the other hand, as I will show in the following part of this chapter, the task of becoming oneself is qualified in mimetic terms.

One of the central ideas in this chapter, and in fact of this thesis, is an understanding that *mimesis* has a great bearing on the genuineness of human being and becoming in the world. It is a problem and a cure for the Dane. The highest qualification of man is to be a spirit for Kierkegaard and "Spirit is precisely: not to be

⁸²⁵ Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Why Fiction?*, transl. by Dorrit Cohn, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2008, p. 267.

like others.”⁸²⁶ Spirit is the religious category that ultimately pertains to the nature of God, which as we will see in the last section of the current chapter, is qualified by absolute difference. As I will show, the ultimate consequence of pursuing to be like God for Kierkegaard is, on the one hand, to seek difference from others as one’s qualitative characteristic; on the other, it entails becoming “like oneself.” What may “compromise” this qualification, amongst other things, is the mimetic phenomenon of comparison so widely discussed in many of his discourses and in *Works of Love*.⁸²⁷ The authentic life of a human being is in fact a constant struggle and negotiation of these various mimetic constituents.

What is indirect imitation? It is a phenomenon that has mimetic and existential dimensions – the former is qualified by the role of intention in the imitative action and the latter characterizes the nature of human decision-making. In its mimetic breadth, indirect imitation is closer in meaning to emulation (a type of imitation concerned with the understanding of the purpose, environment and meaning of an action or object) than to a simple imitation understood as mimicry (imitation that is concerned merely with a detailed capturing and representing an object or action).⁸²⁸ In its existential dimension, indirect imitation is a type of movement that confronts and accommodates the two spheres of existence, immediate and reflective, permitting them to exist in tension. Moreover, indirect imitation allows for immediacy after reflection, which is, among other things, represented in one’s “decision to choose” to be oneself and/or follow Christ, and which allows for a certain openness and inventiveness in the realization of that undertaking.

The intention-driven nature of indirect imitation corresponds with Ferreira’s account of the phenomenon in question where imitative practices are considered means to the ideal of humbling oneself before God and Rasmussen’s appraisal of imitation as “a reflective attempt” to imitate Christ in daily life. On its existential level, indirect imitation follows Thulstrup’s condemnation of external imitation, Dewey’s disregard of what he calls “facsimile imitation,” Barnett’s denunciation of

⁸²⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 344 (SKS 13, 408).

⁸²⁷ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p. 27 (SKS 9, 35). “When Christ says (Matthew 10:17), ‘Beware of people,’ I wonder if by this is not also meant: Beware of being tricked out of the highest by people, that is, by continual comparison with other people, by habit, and by externals?”

⁸²⁸ It is difficult to ultimately settle differences between imitation, emulation, mimicry, copying, and so forth. I find it useful to have recourse to Merlin Donald’s distinction between *mimesis*, imitation and mimicry in mimetic performance in his “Imitation and Mimesis,” in *Perspectives on Imitation*, pp. 286-8.

“martyrdom as the consummation of Christian existence,”⁸²⁹ and Walsh’s reading of Christ as a “non-direct” pattern for human existence.

To offer a more detailed account of indirect imitation, I would like to go back to Kierkegaard’s account of the lily and the bird in relation to human existence, *mimesis*, and the second immediacy. As it was noted in Chapter Two, the lily and the bird represent a mimetic model for Kierkegaard. Following Pattison, the lily and the bird are, by nature of pure immediacy, contrary to the realm of the human being, which is characterized by reflection. What is required from a Christian is to be as obedient and “single-minded” in following Christ as the lily and the bird are, but this must be a matter of a human decision. Put differently, according to Kierkegaard, we should be immediate in reflection. The problem is therefore *how to do that*.

As Pattison notes, we cannot literally live like the lily and the bird; dismissing our inwardness compromises our nature, as it is qualified by a certain advantage over the natural world, which is precisely our ability to reflect.⁸³⁰ The mistake is therefore to fall back on nature, which is to live by natural laws and human instincts. The other extreme is to immerse oneself completely in reflection, or what Kierkegaard calls reflecting oneself out of actuality. This is indeed the problem of the romantic ideal of “living poetically” discussed by Rasmussen. I have tried to show in the preceding chapters of this thesis, implicitly and explicitly, how both of these ill ends are deeply mimetic in their nature. The first represents imitation according to the ideal of nature and the second challenges and ultimately disregards the confines of nature in imitation.

As I argue, Kierkegaard’s concept of imitation is neither-nor. This means that the subject in question is not direct imitation of that which is immediate in its nature. However, it is also not an imitation of that which has no specific purpose, reason or environment. Imitation in Kierkegaard corresponds with immediacy after reflection, or, as scholars have conceptualized it, its nature is of second immediacy.

I will not attempt a comprehensive account of Kierkegaard’s second immediacy, but, for the sake of the discussion, I will point out several issues the concept entails. Second immediacy is a problematic term, and attempts to interpret it are problematic by the difficulty of understanding the notions of immediacy and

⁸²⁹ Barnett, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*, p. 187.

⁸³⁰ George Pattison, “Eternal Loneliness: Art and Religion in Kierkegaard and Zen,” *Religious Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1989, pp. 385-6.

reflection. As Arne Grøn notes, these are very challenging ideas for several reasons, “On the one hand, immediacy is a concept of reflection, and on the other hand, reflection is what it is by virtue of its relation to immediacy which seems to be dissolved by reflection itself.”⁸³¹ We have to first recognize them as interrelated, then we can understand what the second immediacy means. Grøn suggests, “A second immediacy is an immediacy which is not dissolved by reflection, but an immediacy *after* reflection and maybe an immediacy *through* reflection.”⁸³² Moreover, the concept itself refers to different aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought like the self, faith and society.

So comprehended, second immediacy corresponds with Kierkegaard’s imitation for two reasons. First, it holds in tension the two criticized forms of imitation, immediate (nature) and reflected (freedom). Following what has been already discussed in Rasmussen’s rendering of the concept in question, Kierkegaard offers a new reading of the problem of the modern criticism of *mimesis* by, on the one hand, holding onto the ideal as mimetic model, and on the other, reading imitation as an act of creation within Creation, not mere reproduction. Imitation is therefore “an existential striving within a ‘poetic production’ that God creates.”⁸³³ Human life is a “reflective attempt to imitate in daily living the ‘criterion’ and ‘goal’ of human life as expressed by God in Christ.”⁸³⁴ As one can see, neither of the ideals are discarded (“criterion” and “goal” as immutably established), nor is human freedom annulled (reflective attempt).

Direct imitation annuls the tension between the immediate and the reflective, and initially seems to bring us back to the immediate. However, this is merely an illusion, because returning to immediacy takes place only in reflection, which as such annuls immediacy. What is required is the concrete conceived after reflection. Only imitation understood as indirect is able to hold the two in tension; this is contrary to indirect imitation, which as such appears as a problematic task, to say the least.

Fleshing it out, the life of Christ occurred as something direct in time; however, our understanding of it should be comprehended as in tension with the ideal of the requirement His life imposes on us. The life of a Christian should be *lived out*,

⁸³¹ Arne Grøn, “Mediated Immediacy? The Problem of a Second Immediacy,” *Immediacy and Reflection in Kierkegaard's Thought*. Louvain Philosophical Studies 17, ed. by P. Cruysberghs, J. Taels, K. Verstrynge, Leuven: Leuven University Press 2003, p. 87.

⁸³² *Ibid.*

⁸³³ Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness*, p. 109.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.

not thought out in reflection. However, this is something that is to be realized in freedom. We can only learn what imitation of Christ is through reflection, but without reference to the sphere of immediacy, we cannot truly imitate. As Rasmussen puts it, “Christianity...is a revelation that instructs on how to live truly, not a revelation that enables comprehension of its truth.”⁸³⁵ Following Anti-Climacus, to know the truth is to be the truth.⁸³⁶

Second, both second immediacy and Kierkegaard’s imitation, qualify the dimensions of self, faith and society. This can be seen in Kierkegaard’s repeated references to the lily and the bird. As Pattison argues, Kierkegaard’s triad of immediacy-reflection-second immediacy represents three classes or stages of existence: nature, pagans from the Gospels, and Christians.⁸³⁷ These stages are all qualified by *mimesis*.

Kierkegaard’s references to nature do not testify to his great interest in biology, and flora and fauna, or to the fact that he is a naturalist. The thinker rather uses them to present his points, often about *mimesis*, and often in a mimetic way. For example, Kierkegaard’s tales about the flower plucked up by a bird or about the wild pigeon and domesticated dove from *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, do not give an account of occurrences in the natural world, but are metaphors that illustrate relationships from the human world. As Pattison argues, they give an account of impatience, indecision and thanklessness both as the reverse of virtue, but also as the condition of the modern man.⁸³⁸

They can also be interpreted according to Girard’s mimetic desire, especially its acquisitive dimension. In the first tale, the flower desires to see places that the bird cherishes. In the second tale, the pigeon wants to be like the dove, acting against its wild nature and pretending to be what it is not. Both the flower and the pigeon perish. What we get from these stories is that imitative desire is destructive for three reasons; it alters the self (alteration of nature), it alters our faith (the pigeon starts worrying about his food), and it alters society (abolition of differences).

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-6.

⁸³⁶ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, p. 205 (SKS 12, 202). “And therefore, Christianly understood, truth is obviously not to know the truth but to be the truth.”

⁸³⁷ Pattison, “Eternal Loneliness,” pp. 385-6 and Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*, pp. 24-5.

⁸³⁸ Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*, pp. 24-5.

Kierkegaard's references to the lily and the bird are indirect descriptions and evaluations of the self, the religious life and the social structures of the people of reflection. These Pattison calls "pagans from the Gospels" and describes them as

those who have lost contact with their rootedness in nature (understood as God's creation) and who, lacking any sense of their own identity, are afflicted with all the ills of mimeticism. These use up their lives in the desperate search for an affirmation they cannot give themselves, adoption and adapting the thoughts, fashions and tastes of the others, in everyday life, culture, philosophy, and democratic politics. They are endlessly striving to be like everyone else or, at least, like those they manipulated into believing to be the most admired prototypes or opinion-makers of the age.⁸³⁹

Pattison adds that the concept of love that these pagans contribute is "essentially selfish love that sees in the other only an another-I, a mirror image of myself—rather than loving the other in his or her genuine otherness."⁸⁴⁰ Following *explicite* Pattison and *implicite* Rasmussen, the Christians are those who are *to be* free (from mimeticism) and dependent (upon God) at the same time.

Putting this into reference with the tension of the second immediacy, Christians are "like" the lily and the bird and the pagans as they still have in themselves these qualities of being immediate and reflective. Having said this, it is important to note that Christians have them both at the same time, in a sense, which is something that neither the lily and the bird nor the pagans can have. What is at stake here is not a case of mere rearrangement from reflection after immediacy to immediacy after reflection, but a qualitative change in the subject in which these qualities are not being annulled but kept in tension. A Christian is therefore what others *cannot* be.

Such an understanding seems to be, on the one hand, Kierkegaard's mimetic strategy utilized to overcome and/or redefine Hegel's *Aufhebung*. On the other hand – and more important in context of this research – it appears to be a return to the "machinery" of Plato's dialogues that often end without a discernable outcome, therefore offering a certain openness. This lack of a resolution from Plato's dialogues corresponds with my understanding of Kierkegaard's imitation as indirect. The fact

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

that the dialogues do not yield direct conclusions stimulates the reader to come up with their own—something lost in the modern way of doing philosophy according to Kierkegaard. Plato’s dialogues are, according to the Dane, “a reproduction of Socrates’ maieutic skill which makes the reader or hearer himself active, and therefore they do not end in a result but in a sting.”⁸⁴¹ Socrates’ maieutic method is translated into a dialogical text, which itself is not a narrative *per se*, but which has a teleological dimension that has yet to be “refigured.”

So comprehended, Plato’s dialogues aim at awaking human agency and invite the reader to a certain co-creation—the dialogues are to be continued, but the initiative is to be on the reader’s side. The learner is to interpret, in the sense of Ricoeur’s “refiguration,” and to venture towards the unknown, not to memorize, rehearse or replicate something (direct imitation). Thus following Kierkegaard, Plato’s dialogue is “an excellent parody of the modern rote-method which says everything the sooner the better and all at one time, which awakens no self-action but only leads the reader to rattle it off like a parrot.”⁸⁴²

The indirectness of imitation is also contained in Kierkegaard’s allegorical presentation of faith as a pilgrimage or journey from *The Gospel of Suffering*. Kierkegaard reinforces these metaphors by juxtaposing them with other mimetic images of followers as strangers and aliens (and pilgrims). Moreover, answering the eponymous question of the text, “What Meaning...There [is] in the Thought of Following Christ,”⁸⁴³ in its invocative prayer Kierkegaard points out that Christ “[himself] once walked the earth and left footprints that we should follow.”⁸⁴⁴ Here again one sees that what is set by Christ to show what it means to imitate Him, is not clearly defined, but rather it is presented as an allegorical image of a track on the ground. A path, a track or a pattern (and prototype) cannot be directly imitated for the very reasons of what it is. It is not a prescription (or suggestion on the other hand), but “guidance.”⁸⁴⁵ The genuine imitation is the one that takes place in the absence of the one followed, although it starts with a clear vision of the teacher or prototype.

⁸⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol 4, p. 210, entry 4266 (SKS 18, 299, JJ:482).

⁸⁴² *Ibid.*

⁸⁴³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p. 218 (SKS 8, 320).

⁸⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 217 (SKS 8, 319).

⁸⁴⁵ *Ibid.* “Guidance enough is indeed offered on life’s way, and no wonder, since every error passes itself off as guidance.”

Analogously, the Disciples of Christ only started following Him after his death. To follow Christ is for Kierkegaard, “to walk by oneself and to walk alone.”⁸⁴⁶

So defined, “following after” can only be achieved in the very process of maturity, which as we will see – if we suspend for a moment its religious dimension – demands a certain withdrawal or separation from the mimetic model on the one hand, but on the other, entails a particular proximity or concreteness expressed in choice. This rendering, which itself is an indirect reference to an already-discussed second immediacy, is elaborated in a metaphor of growing up: Kierkegaard says: “There is a period when Christ almost visibly walks by the child’s side, goes ahead of it, but then there also comes a time when Christ is taken away from the eyes of sensate imagination, so that it can now become manifest whether the adult will follow him in the earnestness of decision.”⁸⁴⁷ This picture, itself located between references to the relation between Christ and disciple, and an image of a child holding onto its mother’s dress, shows that what is at stake in the imitation of Christ is precisely decision. A Christian must decide whether she wants to, referring to Ricoeur’s terminology, “refigure” in her life what has been “prefigured” for her by Christ in his life, and “prescribed” in his footprints. Although to follow Christ means to suffer from various causes and to deny oneself or to take one’s cross, etc., what it truly means is to “[walk] the same road Christ walked.”⁸⁴⁸ The tension here is not, as some scholars put it, on the clear and tangible meaning of the carrying of the cross, or the extent of suffering one has to undertake, or the type of suffering that is to be endured by the follower—these represent a certain directness of imitation that may border with mimicry. Imitation is rather something indirect, based on personal response, which can be seen in Kierkegaard’s reiterations “so that the imitator, even if he does not die on the cross, nevertheless resembles the prototype [*dog ligner Forbilledet*] in dying ‘with the cross on.’”⁸⁴⁹

Although, as it seems, “the following of Christ” has several dimensions for Kierkegaard, spiritual, emotional, psychological, and so forth, the practical aspect is itself very impractical; “In time and eternity” says Kierkegaard, “there is only one choice, one single choice: to choose this road [to follow Christ].”⁸⁵⁰ As the decision is

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 220 (SKS 8, 322).

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 219 (SKS 8, 321).

⁸⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 223 (SKS 8, 324).

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 221 (SKS 8, 323).

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 229 (SKS 8, 330).

the praxis, and vice versa, the practicalities of imitation are not known directly, because imitation is something indirect, and we can only imitate indirectly.

In that sense, what I have shown in this opening section of this last chapter, *mimesis* understood as imitation is both a problem and the cure for Kierkegaard. The former is direct and detailed-orientated *imitation* and the latter is imitation concerned with intention and is indirect.

2. Practice of imitation

So far in this chapter I argued for a certain indirectness of imitation. I have shown that it is essentially related to the notions of intention, second immediacy and choice. Indirect imitation requires the individual's active and concrete response to the unknown that itself is different for different people. Nonetheless, it is also something that comes out of reflection and goes beyond it, into the immediate, that is, the practical.

While Kierkegaard's imitation is that of which a comprehensive account cannot be given, it is something that has its logos, structure, aim, method and strategy. Putting it differently, it is, to a certain extent, not something rational and irrational, or that which has only individualistic and religious dimensions. In this part of my thesis, I will argue that Kierkegaard's imitation, which as indicated in the opening part of this chapter comprises his existential *mimesis*, is a contemplative practice. This training resembles meditative exercises one can find in religious studies and philosophy.⁸⁵¹

As was argued in the previous parts of this research, applying the perspective of *mimesis* to Kierkegaard's imitation, we find among other things, that it is rooted in the medieval practice of following after a mimetic model. Its structure, on its basic level, comprises the imitator, the act of imitating (emulating, enacting or performing) and the imitated model Kierkegaard calls "the prototype." The more nuanced reading shows that numerous prototypes are considered, more than one form of imitation

⁸⁵¹ Although I will not explore this avenue in this research, it is important to notice that Kierkegaard's imitation, rendered as a meditative-religious practice, is not limited to Christianity. In fact to a considerable degree, it does resemble in its structure the core of Buddhist teaching, namely the "Four Noble Truths" and "The Noble Eightfold Path." For instance, Kierkegaard's insistence upon the following of the lily and the bird in a particular order suggests that it secures both the factualness of the path and the soundness of the life of the student. Thus, without first becoming silent, we are unable to embrace what we are in joy. In a similar manner, without first understanding the truth that all life is determined or permeated by suffering, we will not find it reasonable to embark on a path of liberating oneself from it in Buddhism.

takes place at the same time, and that imitation encompasses actions that have opposite directions. The undertaking of imitation, again on its basic level, aims at making a Christian out of a non-Christian. On its more advanced level, however, on the one hand imitation aims at distinguishing what Kierkegaard calls the single individual from the mass of undistinguished numbers that make up what he calls the crowd. On the other hand, imitation transcends its aesthetic dimension that offers the imitator an image of oneself, offering one the direct relationship with oneself in what Kierkegaardians often call the second immediacy.

Here I first consider this more nuanced understanding of Kierkegaard's imitation, describing it as a practice that leads the single individual to the experience of oneself as oneself. Imitation so comprehended also aims at unearthing or disclosing the *eidos* of the human being, which is to be found in the understanding of oneself as stretched between being and becoming, and in the notion of absolute difference. The former is informed by the representation of a human as simultaneously created in the image of God and as becoming that image. The latter testifies for the absolute difference between a human being and God. Together, these notions show that an individual is a kind of unfinished, undefined and unconcluded image of God, which is not a mere copy or semblance, but a fully valuable representation of that which, although absolutely different, is ultimately related to one, namely God.

In his 1849 three devotional discourses "The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air" Kierkegaard as a point of his deliberation takes "What it is to be a human being and what religiously is the requirement to become a human being."⁸⁵² He claims that these can be learnt from the lily and the bird. Putting forward that idea he does at least three things. First, Kierkegaard forces his reader to go back to the evangelical preaching of Christ on the Sermon on the Mount. Second, he states that there is a requirement for being a human being, and third, that one can learn how to be a human being. What does it mean to learn how to be a human being and what can we learn from the lily and the bird from Christ's sermon, especially considering the fact, that in the very narrative of the sermon the lily and the bird say or do nothing, they are in fact silent? I argue that one cannot learn from the lily and the bird any objective knowledge of what it means to be a human, so the relation between them and their student is of a peculiar type, is indirect. For Kierkegaard, the lily and the bird exist as

⁸⁵² Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 3 (SKS 11, 10).

teacher(s) that instruct their student(s) how to gain the right attitude towards the intended object (I argue that the intended object is, besides Christ, oneself). That appropriate attitude towards oneself, and the world, is achieved through a series of undertakings that, as I will argue, are akin to some aspects of *lectio divina*, phenomenological reduction(s), and some Buddhist practices, making it into a contemplative activity.

Yet, the very structure of Kierkegaard's discourse suggests it has a meditative purpose. Following the contemplative tradition of textual hermeneutics from the *devotio moderna* movement, the deliberation opens with a preparatory prayer, where the author stresses the importance of the attitude of humility that should accompany and, eventually, foster a fruitful reading of the Sermon on the Mount. The first reading of the passage starts with Kierkegaard's refutation of the natural reading of the role the lily and the bird play. The natural onlooker sees them as careless, free from responsibility, jovial and happy. It is so because he links that reading of them seen in nature, and then in the Gospel, with his youthful reading of the lily and the bird in "a picture book." Such attitude the author calls poetic, and shows it does not allow for seeing the essence of the lily and the bird because it is rooted in some other previous experience. As we are commanded to be like the lily in the field and the bird of the air, we have to suspend our previous reading of them and embark on an unprejudiced analysis of them. Without that suspension the onlooker will be destined to anxiety and despair. What is to be learned from the lily and the bird is "**silence...or be[ing] silent.**"⁸⁵³

Kierkegaard says: "In this silence is the beginning, which is to seek *first* God's kingdom."⁸⁵⁴ Silence then is the preliminary step one has to undertake before one embarks on the path that leads to getting to know oneself. But silence is not just refraining from speaking; it is becoming silent before God. This has a paradoxical meaning, especially considering that "the advantage of the human being over animal is the ability to speak."⁸⁵⁵ In silence, according to Kierkegaard, we refrain from sharing our opinions about ourselves and the world outside us and prepare ourselves to see these without our pre-knowledge about them being involved in the process of perception and understanding. In silence we refrain from language. The genuine

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 10 (SKS 11, 16); Kierkegaard's bold.

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11 (SKS 11, 16ff).

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11 (SKS 11, 17).

perception of ourselves and the world outside us requires a particular movement in which the onlooker suspends her learned ideas about herself and the world. One has to undertake a particular reduction of one's ideas about the world and oneself, which Kierkegaard describes as a particular step-back from the gained knowledge. He says: "Thus in a certain sense one devoutly comes backward to the beginning. The beginning is not that with which one begins but that to which one comes, and one comes to it backward."⁸⁵⁶

Kierkegaard provides his readers with some examples of what it means to be silent and what the silence is. In its religious sense, silence is realized in prayer, which is not just a spontaneous way of communicating with the divine but an exercise that has to be meticulously practiced. On one level, prayer is about verbalizing one's thoughts, concerns and needs. Here Kierkegaard famously states that "Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays."⁸⁵⁷ Prayer, therefore, has psychological and counseling properties. However in its deeper sense, that can be achieved through repetitive exercise, "when prayer really has become a prayer it has become silence,"⁸⁵⁸ and "to pray aright, is to become silent, and that is to seek first God's Kingdom."⁸⁵⁹

Another account of silence, which is embedded within a quasi-phenomenological description shows that it must be however "discovered" or, better "uncovered." Kierkegaard says:

There is silence out there, and not only when everything is silent in the silent night, but there nevertheless is silence out there also when day vibrates with a thousand strings and everything is like a sea of sound. Each one separately does it so well that not one of them, nor all of them together, will break the solemn silence. There is silence out there...The sea is silent; even when it rages uproariously it is silent. At first you perhaps listen in the wrong way and hear it roar. If you hurry off and report this, you do the sea an injustice. If, however, you take time and listen more carefully, you hear—how amazing!— you hear silence, because uniformity is nevertheless also silence.⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁷ Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p. 23 (SKS 8, 137).

⁸⁵⁸ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 12 (SKS 11, 18).

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13 (SKS 11, 18-9).

Only “the experienced observer” is able to see beyond the initial appearance and is able to extricate that which eludes direct observation.⁸⁶¹ Observing, looking at, or gazing at, are all forms of contemplation. This obviously almost instantly takes us to the *theoria* of the Greeks, the fourth movement of *lectio divina*, *contemplatio*, but also to a phenomenological understanding of observation as philosophical practice. However, if we for a moment go back to the just discussed first discourse from *The Gospel of Sufferings*, which itself is to disclose to us “What Meaning and What Joy There Are in the Thought of Following Christ,” we see in the introductory prayer that Kierkegaard appeals to another ability to see things as they are, which means that in the natural course of things they are hidden. This is an ability to see beyond illusions and distortions. The object of his intention is, in the very ultimate sense, “the eternal happiness with you in the life to come,” but “the mist” conceals how to arrive at that state. To see beyond that veil of certain illusions, like the ones that the Christian life entails avoiding suffering or that it is something deeply communal, the prototype must stand before “the eyes of the soul.” Therefore, the observer must not take things at face value, or for granted, but rather inquire, but not speculate, into realities underlying their singular appearances. A sketch of such a method of observation can be found in Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous essay “Silhouettes” from *Either/Or*:

People pass one another in the street; one person looks just like the next, and the next one is like almost everyone else...the experienced observer...[knows that] when one looks long and attentively at a face, sometimes another face, as it were, is discovered within the face one sees.⁸⁶²

How then can we learn silence? It is by following the lily and the bird that are silent, but that are also silence. Kierkegaard says, “the bird and the lily shall be the teacher, that you shall imitate them, learn from them in all earnestness, that you shall become as silent as the lily and the bird [*at Du skal tage efter dem, lære af dem, ganske alvorligt, at Du skal blive taus som Lilien og Fuglen*].”⁸⁶³

⁸⁶¹ George Pattison, “Kierkegaard and the Limits of Phenomenology” in *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist: An Experiment*, ed. by Jeffrey Hanson, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2010, p. 196.

⁸⁶² Kierkegaard, *Either-Or I*, p. 174 (SKS 2, 172).

⁸⁶³ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 17 (SKS 11, 22).

But silence is not the goal in itself for a Christian. Silence is the pre-condition of the next step to achieving the right perception of oneself and the world, but also one's relation to oneself and the world, which is obedience. Without silence, obedience cannot be achieved. "If silence has never been around you and within you...then you never learned and never will learn obedience."⁸⁶⁴ Drawing upon his previously presented phenomenological description of silence in nature, Kierkegaard says: "Pay attention, then, to nature around you. In nature everything is obedience, unconditional obedience."⁸⁶⁵ Obedience is not opposed to disobedience, but ambivalence, that is linked with temptation and the lack of resoluteness. The onlooker must be resolved and fully concentrated on the object of its observation, with pure intention for its understanding. But the understanding comes after obedience, not the other way around, therefore the accent is put upon the inner quality of the onlooker that precedes with the very act of observation; otherwise the content of observation can be affected by one's will, that from Kierkegaard's perspective, given its Lutheran roots, is corrupted.⁸⁶⁶ He says, "Bear in mind that it was human sin that—by being unwilling to serve one master, or by wanting to serve another master, or by wanting to serve two, indeed, several masters—disturbed the beauty of the whole world where previously everything was so very good, human sin that created a cleft in a world of unity."⁸⁶⁷

Again, obedience is not the goal in itself but a step that leads to something else. Kierkegaard arrives at the final step required in one's objective to see oneself as oneself, joy. Following the lily and the bird we can learn joy, which can be only achieved in—what Kierkegaard calls—"there is a today."⁸⁶⁸ That is the immediate experience of the moment in which no worry for tomorrow occurs. Drawing upon previously achieved silence and obedience, Kierkegaard says:

When you are silent in the solemn silence that is in nature, tomorrow does not exist. When you obey, as the creation obeys, tomorrow does not exist...But when, because of silence and obedience, tomorrow does not exist, then in the

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25 (SKS 11, 29).

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35 (SKS 11, 39).

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38 (SKS 11, 42)

silence and obedience today is, it *is*—and then the joy is as it is in the lily and the bird.⁸⁶⁹

Joy is therefore for Kierkegaard a moment of grasping the essence of oneself in the refined immediate act of perception of oneself. This is possible by virtue of suspending of one's natural attitude towards oneself and the world, a particularly understood *epoche*, which Kierkegaard conducts by meeting the requirements of silence and obedience, and subsequently in the act of seeing oneself as one truly is. He says: "Joy...is truly to be present to oneself; but truly to be present to oneself in this *today*, this *to be* today, truly *to be today*."⁸⁷⁰ In its being before God one becomes transparent to oneself, which does not mean that one can see through oneself, but rather that one can see oneself as a concrete subject.⁸⁷¹ Being before God as a single individual does not have just its existential dimension, but also has its phenomenological meaning, which indicates the concreteness and irreducibility of the single individual as an object of phenomenological observation. Moreover, this also bears upon another aspect of human existence, which is its practical dimension that corresponds with the way an individual sees oneself and then strives to become oneself. This is a subject I will cover in the latter part of this chapter.

Referring to what has been said about Kierkegaard's imitation as a kind of phenomenological exercise *a la* Husserl, one could say that it both includes a form of *epoche* and *eidetic* reduction that is a kind of universalization that—as it was shown in the examples of silence and face—aims at seeing beyond particularities. Kierkegaard's imitation so rendered, seeks to expose what the human being is against the horizon of God, or in the presence of God. Taking stock of Heidegger's belief in the "covered-up-ness" of being, Kierkegaard's imitation is a "method" of making the essence of the human being manifest before God. As Hart indicates elsewhere, "[Kierkegaard's] concern is to live *coram Deo*, and not before being or before death [like in Heidegger]."⁸⁷² Moreover, Kierkegaard's imitation to a certain extent seems to be a form of reduction that, following Merleau-Ponty's thought, is never completed. That however has to be comprehended in a dialectical manner. On the one hand,

⁸⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9 (SKS 11, 42ff).

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39 (SKS 11, 43).

⁸⁷¹ Arnold Come, *Kierkegaard as Humanist. Discovering My Self*, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1995, p. 275.

⁸⁷² Kevin Hart, "The Elusive Reductions" in *Kierkegaard as Phenomenologist*, p. 18.

imitation of the prototype brings us closer to the one, but on the other hand, imitation discloses the difference that is the essence of God-human relationship. Therefore having faith that God loves us we have to begin our following after him again and again. Kierkegaard referring to the phenomenon of the imitation of Christ says: “Every step forward toward the ideal [the prototype] is a backward step, for the progress consists precisely in my discovering increasingly the perfection of the ideal—and consequently my greater distance from it.”⁸⁷³

The other thing is that, the essence of the human being is disclosed in, what has been discussed, “truly to be present to oneself in this *today* [where] tomorrow does not exist.”⁸⁷⁴ Therefore the *eidos* of the human being is to be grasped in the moment that has eternal, and thus theological, significance. Comprehending the *eidos* of the human being in this way, which Pattison calls after Dostoyevsky “man in man,” discloses its religious dimension, which is “the self’s self-relation.”⁸⁷⁵ So understood Kierkegaard’s imitation as a phenomenological reduction fits with Merleau-Ponty’s reflection upon a particular evolution in Husserl’s understanding of the reduction that is “less of a method defined once and for all than the index of a multitude of problems.”⁸⁷⁶

Without a doubt, reading Kierkegaard’s imitation as a form of reduction with a wink towards phenomenology, but also as related to religious practices of *lectio divina* has its serious limitations. What I wanted to show is that in light of these religious practices and the phenomenological reduction, Kierkegaard’s imitation understood as the grand project of becoming oneself is not just a vague and indefinable existential undertaking, in which one realizes this particular existential task of raising oneself to this elevated position of being a human being. It is also a *thoroughly structured enterprise* that starts from oneself as pre-given in various modalities and arrives at the very essence of oneself as the given before the Absolute. Moreover, in stark contrast with the previous chapter, in which I presented Kierkegaard wrestling with, what Schachtel calls, “the gap between experience and words,”⁸⁷⁷ I tried to show that it is also a way of reaching, so to speak, second

⁸⁷³ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, p. 287, entry 1789 (SKS 24, 47, NB21:67).

⁸⁷⁴ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 39 (SKS 11, 43).

⁸⁷⁵ Pattison, “Kierkegaard and the Limits,” p. 195.

⁸⁷⁶ Hart, “The Elusive Reductions,” p. 12.

⁸⁷⁷ Ernest G. Schachtel, “On Memory and Childhood Amnesia, in his *Metamorphosis: On the Conflict of Human Development and the Development of Creativity*, Hillsdale and London: The Analytic Press 2001, p. 296.

immediacy that is lost in his autobiographical remarks. In the following section, I will analyze additional fundamental categories of Kierkegaard's imitation, contemporaneity, difference and sin, themselves reaching back to already discussed aspects of the phenomenon in question, but also opening new frontiers for its understanding.

3. Beyond imagery and reflection

So far I have discussed imitation as indirect and intention driven phenomenon and as a practice that resembles phenomenological reduction. I have shown that imitation so defined informs Kierkegaard's theory of human being and becoming and his take on the imitation of Christ. In this section I would like to unpack the earlier expressed thought that imitation so comprehended is a fundamental component of Kierkegaard's existential *mimesis*. This I will demonstrate by linking the ideas from the preceding sections with an appraisal of the human being as image-maker and the mimetically qualified human being and doing in the world.

The main topic for my investigation is the imagery dimension of the human being, which has two forms. The first is expressed in the thought by Iris Murdoch, who famously wrote that "Man is a creature who makes pictures of himself and then comes to resemble the picture."⁸⁷⁸ The second form we find in the notion of human being portrayed as an image of God, which has a dialectical dimension. Following the Scriptures, an individual is both created in the image of God (the Old Testament paradigm) and strives to become that image (the New Testament paradigm). Additionally, although essentially informed by Christian tradition, the imagery dimension of the human being is not limited to it. We observe that by taking into account the fact that *imago Dei-imitatio Christi* corresponds with being-becoming that qualifies Kierkegaard's existential project, and, as I will explain, the particular understanding of image at work here.

Following Murdoch's expression, I contend Kierkegaard's project of becoming entails a process of first generating an image of oneself and then striving to make it present in real life. I claim that both undertakings, i.e. creating an image of oneself and then redoubling it in the real world, are deeply mimetic. In that sense I am drawing upon my deliberations on human becoming from the previous chapter where

⁸⁷⁸ Iris Murdoch, "Metaphysics and Ethics," in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1999, p. 75.

I discussed redoubling, reduplication and double-reflection as the existential constructs that bridge possibility and actuality in the configuring-interpretative process. In what follows, I argue that (especially) Kierkegaard's redoubling corresponds with Ricoeur's "refiguration" (and this in turn suggests that Ricoeur's "prefiguration" corresponds with Kierkegaard's thinking through image). Consequently, Kierkegaard's image as a means of existential formation corresponds with the account of narrative formation from Chapter Four. Thus, the mimetically qualified structure of human self, its action and formation – where the self is comprehended as an image and is itself an image-maker – is part of Kierkegaard's existential *mimesis*, and as I will show further down this chapter, it is essentially related to non-imitative, intention driven and indirect imitation.

Before unveiling the complexity of Kierkegaard's existential *mimesis*, I would like to concentrate briefly on the understanding of the image that will be used here. First, it is important to notice that Murdoch initially speaks of making *pictures* and then about resembling the *picture*. This already indicates that there is not one privileged image that humans attempt to create, but in fact numerous images are at stake at a time, and the image that is to be resembled is in fact a plethora of images. Moreover, on the one hand, the image of the human is that which is perceived as suspect in our time, as it can be used as a means of exhorting power on that which is different, the other, but it can also elicit a form of self-imposed limitation. As Schweiker rightly points out, we should approach the logic of the image "with the knowledge that the forms of discourse, images, symbols, and 'pictures' used to interpret life concretely informs what it is we become."⁸⁷⁹ On the other hand, on a daily basis we engage images in our understandings of ourselves—we think through them as we use them to conceptualize ourselves.⁸⁸⁰ What has not been clearly pointed out by scholars especially in this context, though, we are responsible not only for living our lives out there in the real, but also for designing the right images of ourselves and the world as these are an inalienable part of our daily lives. To put it another way, the whole process of generating or, using Ricoeur's language, "prefiguring" the image is part of our being and doing in the world.

There are two types of images that are at play in Kierkegaard's work, and both have their meanings rooted in Plato's rendering of image from the *Symposium*. One of

⁸⁷⁹ Schweiker, *Mimetic Reflections*, p. 1.

⁸⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

the subjects of the discussion in the dialog is beauty. The stranger of Mantinea informs Socrates that beauty is the object of life-contemplation, and that it is different from “images of beauty.”⁸⁸¹ The Greek word for image at work here is *idol*, which is an image understood as that which represents an object on its visual level, but has no essential relation to that which is being represented. On the other hand, the one that lives the life that contemplates beauty lives in communion with beauty. Here the image of beauty is a person—represented by Socrates in the dialogue—who is the one having images of gods inside him. The word at play here is *icon*.⁸⁸² Socrates is then a living image that has a communion with beauty and, by virtue of that, points beyond himself to that he represents and testifies to in life, namely, beauty.

A corresponding consideration of image we find in one of Paul’s letters. In his communication with the Christian communities in Colossae, the apostle informs that Christ is “the image of the invisible God,” and the Greek word for image is also *icon*. This agrees with the above-suggested distinction between *idol* and *icon*, where the latter testifies for something that is not available to a general onlooker on a regular basis.

A similar discernment occurs in Jean-Luc Marion’s *God Without Being*. He conceptualizes the difference between icon and idol suggesting the latter is like a mirror in which we can only see our reflections.⁸⁸³ As icon allows us to see beyond its imagery dimension, it is like a vista through which we look at that it communicates.

Lastly, these considerations of the two types of images from Plato, the Apostle Paul and Marion, also take us back to our recent analysis of imitation as phenomenological reduction, the thought that we are and are becoming an image of God, and the representational dimension of the image of the ideal self from Chapter Three. In that sense the *eidos* of man is this particularly defined image, which points beyond itself and has a dynamic and unfolding structure, contrary to *idol*, which has only its imagery and “static” dimension. The philosophical conclusion that comes from that is the *how* we understand and picture ourselves (as completed or unfolding, or emphasizing facts about us or possibilities that await us, etc.) determines our being-becoming, even if our becoming is not part of that picture. Moreover, as discussed at length in the two preceding chapters, the imagery dimension of our being shows that

⁸⁸¹ *Symposium*, 211b-212b.

⁸⁸² *Ibid.*, 214e-215c.

⁸⁸³ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, transl. by Thomas A. Carlson, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1991, especially pp. 7-22.

our being and becoming is a constant re-presentation and re-enactment of ourselves, which means going beyond confines of that which is to be made present.

To summarize, we either engage with images that exhaust their meanings in what they are – their imagery dimension – or we follow icons that point beyond themselves, away from their imagery dimension, and are to be read with reference to what they make present (ideas, God, or oneself).

An example of how one can go about creating and resembling the image can be found in Kierkegaard's account of his youth from his *The Point of View*. In that famous passage, the author talks about the relation between how he understood what his life was about, what it should look like and how he translated that into the real existence. From, "That is how I sadly understood myself," to "So I went out into life," to "I had to become and did become an observer," we see the structure of the transition from envisaging oneself as someone (producing an image of oneself in possibility) to conceptualizing oneself as existing in reality, finally to actualizing that vision. In that account, Kierkegaard presents himself as living a particular type of life he envisaged and producing an image of that existence expected by the community he lived in ("striving to produce the appearance that I was enjoying it"). This was possible by relating together certain experiences of life ("initiated into every possible enjoyment of life"), practice of imitation ("entering into and coming out of a person and also imitating [*eftergøre*] him") and imagination ("my imagination and my dialectic continually had plenty of material to work on"). These three are presented in the fragment as constantly overlapping, mingling and supporting each other.⁸⁸⁴ So presented life did not bring joy to the author. This he concludes from facing the envisaged life with actuality, which is by venturing beyond reflection. From the perspective of the time he says, "I have had no immediacy, and therefore, understood in a purely and simply human sense, I have not lived. I began at once with reflection, did not accumulate a little reflection in later life, but I actually am reflection from first to last."⁸⁸⁵

Without a doubt, this was a failed attempt on Kierkegaard's side to bridge the gap between the envisaged and the actual self and world. Considering this example in light of Kierkegaard's existential *mimesis*, we are faced with important questions.

⁸⁸⁴ See for example: Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 82 (SKS 16, 61). "For long periods I have done nothing but practice dialectical exercises with an admixture of imagination."

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83 (SKS 16, 61ff).

How to move from what I am to what I am supposed to be? Looking at it from a different angle, what is my ideal and how do I go from that ideal of myself to being it reality? What makes the connection between the ideal and the real successful? Lastly, why do we engage in producing *images* and striving to resemble *it* in the first place?

These are deeply mimetic problems and they can be understood in relation to *mimesis*, imagination and reflection. To give account of some of these issues, I recourse to the their renderings in the thoughts of Stokes and Pattison. As it was noted in my account of Stokes' take on Kierkegaard's imitation in Chapter One, the ability of the self to become what one truly is, is based on the subject's capacity to first envisage oneself as different from what one is and then to flesh that vision out. This is to say that one has to first go beyond oneself—an act possible through imaginative reflection—and then to return to oneself in that reflection and to embark on the process of actualization of oneself. In that endeavor, one finds the ideal of oneself interesting, and then the image exerts some power over us and we, as the author puts it, are being claimed by the image. Without a great deal of framing the problem in relation to *mimesis*, Stokes points out that the recognition of the demand of the image-ideal in *Practice in Christianity* distinguishes the true Christian from a mere admirer, who detaches herself from the image. The true imitation of an exemplar requires relating to it in a personal and practical way.

Building upon these deliberations, I would like to return to *icon* and *idol* and show that it is not just “the mode” of human relationship towards the image that influences both the relationship to it and the human subject in that relationship, but also the “kind” of image in question. As Stokes argues, only so defined images can claim something from the subject. This is to say that existential *mimesis* requires both the interested subject and the sort of image that neither exhausts its meaning in what it is (in its imagery), nor defers it to some other relative meaning, but defies comparison, resists naïve contemplation and directs the subject both to something ultimately different and ineffable that it signifies *and* to the importance of self-examination in place of self-reflexivity.

My main point of departure here is Pattison's account of Kierkegaard's critique of modernity, especially, “citizens of a bourgeois democracy.”⁸⁸⁶ Pattison argues that the people of the city “constantly negotiate their identity...by ‘comparison.’”⁸⁸⁷ What

⁸⁸⁶ Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest of Unambiguous Life*, p. 19.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

has been so far “an integral part of growing up, [that is] playing with multitude identities,”⁸⁸⁸ became a way of life. People lacking identity are prone to “borrow” the identity of others indiscriminately; this also entails lack of commitment, as the life-view that becomes obsolete or boring easily ends up discarded. Whether something is that, outdated and unexciting, is decided in the blink of comparative reflection, without the thorough consideration a worldview requires. This is understood by Kierkegaard as a phenomenon that resembles fashion, which is based on exchanges of looks of appreciation or the lack of these. Pattison says, “The world of fashion is a world constructed and maintained in the constant exchange of comparative glances, it is a world consummated in its ‘look.’”⁸⁸⁹ At fault here is reflection understood simply, one that goes from a subject and bounces back modified on the very superficial level, but essentially untouched. What is lost in all this is the authenticity and completeness of human selfhood. On the one hand, we treat the world and ourselves as mere mirrors that provide us with a multitude of reflective images of ourselves and to make sense of them we throw ourselves in this unending circle of evaluation and association based on the very superficial quality of these images. One’s inability to truly recognize oneself is impaired, as the default point of reference becomes “the mirror of the group,” which ultimately hinders upon one’s self-commitment and “all the more reinforce[s] the grip of mimeticism.”⁸⁹⁰ On the other hand, the inability to recognize oneself in the mirror results from the lack of self-consciousness.⁸⁹¹ In the state of the human self Anti-Climacus calls “possibility’s despair,” we cherish our reflection in “the mirror of possibility,” that is a fantastic image of ourselves that never gets concretized; therefore in the “mirror of possibility” we only arrive at a “half of the self,” which is the self that never becomes actual. We have to be careful with that mirror, as its infinitizing mode of operation may leave us content with a “prefigured” image that never gets “refigured,” and therefore never actualizes itself.⁸⁹²

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸⁹¹ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, p. 36-7 (SKS 11, 152). “Therefore, the tragedy is not that such a self did not amount to something in the world; no, the tragedy is that he did not become aware of himself, aware that the self he is is a very definite something and thus the necessary. Instead, he lost himself, because this self fantastically reflected itself in possibility. 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.”

⁸⁹² *Ibid.*

In the above-discussed accounts of life, the image was conceptualized as *idol*, not as *icon*. The latter is fundamental for Kierkegaard's existential *mimesis*, as it points beyond itself and is concerned with actuality—understood as unity of possibility and necessity—and therefore demands active response in the world. Additionally, *icon* is also related to the second immediacy, because the existential redoubling is an act that comes after reflection. As we see in Kierkegaard's account of his aesthetic phase of life, the author acted according to an image understood as *idol*, because his main concern was the relationship of agreement between the various images he construed (of himself and his world) and the way of verifying them was in imagination and reflection, a method he calls “testing my mind and spirit as one tunes an instrument.”⁸⁹³ What brought him out of that form of living was the death of his father, an instance of the immediate and concrete.

The logics of *icon* and of the purely reflective mirror impact upon the relationship between humans as individuals. An instance of that we find in a short story from “The Seducer's Diary” where the author, Johannes, exercises his voyeuristic inclinations observing a young woman in a shop. He sees the girl himself being unseen, but what is even more interesting, his observation is mediated by a mirror. The mirror “has faithfully caught her image”⁸⁹⁴ and displays that image to the onlooker, but it cannot grasp her. And indeed that was what the pleasure-seeking flâneur is looking for, a mere reflection of the young woman abstracted from the concrete person; he wants the ideal of beauty to be reflected in the mirror, detached from the actual human being. Yet, the author feels that he does not do the young woman injustice, as she is interested in mere reflections herself. With a hinted reference to the imagery of Christian pieta, the author notices that, although she looks like Madonna, she does not contemplate the One, but rather “she is contemplating...multiplicity, the multiplicity over which earthly pomp and glory cast a reflection.”⁸⁹⁵

Besides the fact that the woman's “faithful” representation in the mirror entirely disagrees with already discussed intention-driven and indirect imitation, by being looked upon without a chance to look back at the onlooker, the young woman loses her inwardness and becomes an image of aesthetic contemplation, one among many.

⁸⁹³ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 82 (SKS 16, 61).

⁸⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, *Eitehr-Or I*, p. 315 (SKS 2,305).

⁸⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Johannes' "just evaluation" of the feminine goes along with Kierkegaard's. For the latter "fashion is a woman"⁸⁹⁶ because both fashion and women are inconsistency.⁸⁹⁷ Abstracting from Kierkegaard's intentions to reveal the image of the human, his reasoning may be in danger of reinforcing what he may be striving to challenge, the logic of the image. His representation of the feminine is indeed what Simone de Beauvoir succinctly phrases, "representation of the world as the world itself is the work of man."⁸⁹⁸ Following MacKinnon, we would say that the man's image of a woman makes who a woman is.⁸⁹⁹ It is so because the connection between "seeing as" and "being as" is much stronger than we usually suspect it is, and, on a closer look, the former translates into the latter and the latter reinforces the former.⁹⁰⁰

Of whatever Kierkegaard is guilty from the perspective of feminist studies, we see that his understanding of the image of beauty here is different from the living image represented by Socrates in the *Symposium*, by Christ in the *Colossians*, and from Marion's *icon*. In the *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard says that, "A person should begin with loving the unseen, God, because then he himself will learn what it is to love."⁹⁰¹ This is possible by loving the image of God represented in Christ, who is the image of the invisible, or makes the invisible visible. This is contrary to the image put forward by Johannes, where contemplation of the visible leads to multiplicity of semblances, comparisons, disinterestedness, alienation from the real and annihilation of differences between people.

In a similar manner to Kierkegaard's apprehension of the two types of images, we have two types of mirrors. Apart from the one just criticized, we have a mirror that, following Stokes, allows for "the *immediate* self-recognition,"⁹⁰² which "is not a comparative phenomenon, where we note similarities between what we perceive and some pre-existing template."⁹⁰³ Such a mirror is represented in Scriptures and the Other that simultaneously assess and compel us to proceed from contemplation to

⁸⁹⁶ Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, p. 66 (SKS 6, 66).

⁸⁹⁷ Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*, p. 20.

⁸⁹⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, transl. by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, London: Vintage Books 2010, p. 166.

⁸⁹⁹ Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," *Sings*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1982, p. 537. "The parallel between representation and construction should be sustained. Men create the world from their own point of view, which then becomes the truth to be described. This is a closed system, not anyone's confusion."

⁹⁰⁰ Henry Venema, "Paul Ricoeur on Refigurative Reading and Narrative Identity," *Symposium* vol. 4, no. 2, 2000, p. 242.

⁹⁰¹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p. 160 (SKS 9, 161).

⁹⁰² Stokes, *Kierkegaard's Mirrors*, p. 112.

⁹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 114.

action by addressing us as agents. However, as Kierkegaard rightly notices, “a certain kind of preparation is required...in order to look at oneself [in the mirror] with true blessing,” and to see oneself truly means to “die to all illusions and hypocrisy” we hold about ourselves.⁹⁰⁴ This means that we have to reinstate that true image of ourselves in the place of the one that falsifies how and what of ourselves we perceive and how and what of ourselves we present to others. It also ties with the notion of imitation as practice, what stipulates that to see ourselves as we truly are, we need to undertake a considerable amount of meditative and “reducting” exercises, because the true image of ourselves defies what is given in the natural attitude.

What I have just indicated has some practical consequences, because we translate into action how we put into images the others, the world, and ourselves. Besides, it also has a more theoretical dimension, no less important, as it “conceptualizes” our nature as that which is both stretched between potentiality and actuality, possibility and necessity, ideality and reality. Although our existence is of the immediate—life is to be lived out not thought out—we partially function in and through various images, and therefore we live in potentiality, in possibility and ideality. This is not something that comes from human imperfection, but rather is related to our mimetic nature, which determines our thinking and acting in the world. It also agrees with the fact that we have been created in the image of God, therefore the image that we in some sense simultaneously have and have to acquire, is broadly speaking our design. These aspects of *what* and *how* we are, are accommodated in Kierkegaard’s existential *mimesis*.

Without a doubt, Kierkegaard is not interested in sketching a comprehensive theory of human cognition. Still, by referring to two brief examples I would like to demonstrate that Kierkegaard’s appraisal of the human as a particularly rendered image and of their thinking and acting through images run throughout his works and deeply characterize his way of reasoning. At the outset, I would like come back to Kierkegaard’s preoccupation with the theme of *imago Dei*—the subject so extensively discussed in contemporary academic accounts of Kierkegaard’s imitation. Apart from what has been already said, the fact that we are created in the image of God defines our (distinguished) identity, outlines our moral conduct and simultaneously measures

⁹⁰⁴ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 4, p. 40, entry 3902 (SKS 24, 425; NB24:159).

whether we are up to its expectations.⁹⁰⁵ But there is something more important; following Julius Muller, Kierkegaard indicates that by creating us in Her image, “God theomorphizes—precisely therefore man does not anthropomorphize when he supposes God as a being resembling man. If one were subjectively compelled to regard everything which man pronounces about God in accordance with his essence as mere anthropomorphism, then God could not have made man more unqualified to know him than by creating him in his image.”⁹⁰⁶ This Kierkegaard notices in response to people’s tendency to creating God in human’s image—which is, according to the thinker—diminishing or rejecting the divine nature in us.⁹⁰⁷ This is to say that, by creating God in our image we are not elevating ourselves to the realm of the divine, but are ridding ourselves of “a presence of God in us,”⁹⁰⁸ therefore falling back on the pre-Christian understanding of the world, namely, mythology.⁹⁰⁹

In his judgment upon Mynster and Martensen, Kierkegaard says: “As a man is, so is his Christ-image. Mynster could not imagine him except at a certain *sophisticated* distance from actuality; Martensen could not imagine him *without scholarly sermonizing*, etc.”⁹¹⁰ Though the actual meaning of this fragment is ambiguous, it is remarkable how Kierkegaard envisages the relation between these figures and Christ through, first, the means of “Christ-image,” (Mynster and Martensen “could not imagine him”) and, second, by “visualizing” how these figures visualize “Christ-image.” Although at stake here for Kierkegaard is the relationship between Christ and the clergy, the way of theorizing is through an act of producing a

⁹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p., 597, entry 5033 (SKS 26, 160; NB32:63) “A splendid world, where man, created in the image of God, essentially lives to eat, drink, accumulate money—in short, occupies himself with the things which make him forget that he is created in the image of God.” *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 154, entry 4151 (SKS 21, 126; NB7:94) “[F]or the emperor’s image is on the tax coin, but the Christian bears God’s image and therefore does with his whole person what he is commanded to do with the coin—gives himself wholly to the one whose image he bears.”

⁹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 29, entry 76 (SKS 23, 109; NB16:23).

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 88, entry 1311 (SKS 17, 276; DD:198) “Remember that you are created in his image and according to his likeness, and this is the highest, the most glorious thing that can be said—and you willfully and arbitrarily want to create him in your image and form him according to your own likeness.”

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 54f, entry 3915 (SKS 27, 245; Papir 270). “There is a blessedness of contemplation; it unites what God has united, it links together what God has linked together—man with God and God with man; it shows you the image of your Lord and Master, the image of man in God and the image of God in man; it humbles you with the representation of your unlikeness, and you sink to your knees in adoration; it raises you up with the hope of likeness, and you rise up humble and full of confidence. There is a presence of God in us.”

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 190, entry 2700 (SKS 27, 154; Papir 200) “The mythology produced by the Middle Ages was, if I may say so, humanistic—that is, mythology in the proper sense is the creation of God in human form; this mythology creates man in his image (more epic); it was life which was supposed to clarify itself.”

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 148, entry 335 (SKS 23, 482); translation modified.

series of mental images.⁹¹¹ This is to say that, following Ricoeur's theory of "seeing as" prompts "being as," the way Mynster and Martensen envisage Christ determines their following after Christ, but also the way Kierkegaard sees the clergy determines his action towards them.

A more visual example of that phenomenon is from a very early period of Kierkegaard's production, where by reading a copy of Lichtenberg's book, he says: "Worse yet, in the copy that I am reading a marking has been made which disturbs me, for already I have a mental image [*jeg seer allerede i Aanden*] of some journalist who has carefully gone through this work in order to fill the newspaper with aphorisms with or without Lichtenberg's name, and in this way, I regret, he has robbed me of some of the surprise."⁹¹² What we see in this humorous passage is that Kierkegaard's reasoning is very visual and pictographic. He "sees already in the Spirit" what the previous reader of the book was interested in. Inferring from the person's underlining in the book, which suggests what is important in it, Kierkegaard already knows that the person did not get what the book was really about.

4. Difference-Inversion

The genuine image and the genuine mirror are to be understood as both challenging and escaping the perils of the mechanism of comparison so fundamental to mimeticism. In this part, I demonstrate that difference is another mimetic category that contributes to the discussed problem of mimeticism. Clearly, it is beyond the scope of my investigation to give a comprehensive account of Kierkegaard's reading of difference in context of *mimesis* here; as I have noted in the introduction, it would require an analysis of his first authorship with a special consideration of repetition. At times, however, I will recourse to the first authorship to sketch a necessary background for my investigation.

As was indicated in the previous part of this work, Kierkegaard's anthropology informs that certain "differences" qualify a human being. This means that in her essence, a human being is different from nature by virtue of her ability to reflect. The other quality that contributes to the distinction is the realm of spirit. It is what

⁹¹¹ My understanding of mental images (mental models) is not a voice in the ongoing discussion on the issue of mental representation among philosophers, psychologists, neurologists and cognitive scientists.

⁹¹² *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 16, entry 3855 (SKS 17, 231; DD:29).

separates us from the world of nature, but it is what relates us to God and makes imitation of Christ possible. Following Anti-Climacus in his famous introduction from *The Sickness Unto Death* and Kierkegaard in his Journals, both a human being and God are spirit(s). On the one hand this makes the relation between them viable and conditions imitation. It is so because our intention to follow Christ is not the only factor that makes the following of Christ possible. On the contrary, it is Christ who draws us into Himself and this is through shared spiritual dimension—"spirit draw[s] spirit to itself."⁹¹³ On the other hand, it is also that which delineates the difference between human beings and God. Even in spirit, sin is that which marks the absolute difference between the two.

Therefore following Walsh's "inverse dialectic," in Christ we are simultaneously like and unlike God. This idea appears already in an early journal entry from 1845 where Kierkegaard states "the religious man admires God, who is of course the absolutely different but still is that with whom he ought to have likeness through absolute unlikeness."⁹¹⁴ Abstracting here from the fact that Kierkegaard uses "admiration" in this context, the point in that entry is that our relationship to and with God should presuppose the fact that first and foremost God is absolutely different from us. That "quality" makes God essentially unintelligible to us without revelation.

As I will show in this section, Kierkegaard's concept of sin is "more" than a theological category, or a philosophical notion that contributes to our understanding of the human realm, but a challenge to the modern attempts to do away with the category of difference. I demonstrate that, on the one hand, Kierkegaard's main thought is that difference is a complex matter fundamental to the understanding of a human being and her environment, but also the realm of God. On the other hand, I argue that his radical rendering of difference is a commentary on a more general intellectual debate on the relation between identity and difference among the moderns, a debate not without effect on the Christian dogmatic. Using Mark C. Taylor's quote, "Kierkegaard...asks how difference itself can be articulated without reducing it to the same."⁹¹⁵ In what follows, I will first briefly introduce the aforementioned mimetic problem Kierkegaard addresses, and subsequently, I illustrate his response to it.

⁹¹³ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, p. 160 (SKS 12, 164).

⁹¹⁴ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 4, p. 287, entry 4430 (*Pap.* VI A 123).

⁹¹⁵ Mark C. Taylor, *Altarity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1987, p. 342; Cf. Mark C. Taylor, "Denegating God," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1994, pp. 598-601.

As has been already indicted in previous parts of this work, the radical distinction between the ideal and its representation has been negotiated since its initial delineation in Plato's dialogues. Questions pertaining to the status of representation like "what makes something into a representation of something else," "what is the relation between them" and "when representation is successful" were among the most fervently discussed by the intellectuals of the eighteenth- and nineteenth century. At play were the concepts of *idem at alter* and *idem in alio* of which the main idea was a belief in a certain oneness and wholeness that unifies the world.

Following Burwick, the Romantics attempted to reconcile the traditional opposition of mind and matter by grounding [philosophy] in the cognitive union of subject and object. If imitation is to represent respectively the phenomena of subjective experience, then it must somehow counter its own objective form. In romantic aesthetics...mimesis was understood as transformation in which essential sameness is retained in spite of the otherness of its material mediation.⁹¹⁶

This demand for reconciliation has been partially predisposed by the Platonic-Aristotelian heritage—the mimetic legacy that conveyed the opposition of imitation of ideal form and of the process of thought. To conceptualize and investigate that notion scholars engaged the antinomy of similarity and difference. Schleiermacher's and Hegel's deliberations over the relation between identity and difference have their fundamentals precisely in their endeavors to reconcile form and thought. For the thinkers, "The union of form and thought in the creative process...is identity in difference."⁹¹⁷

Without venturing into a more detailed presentation of that complex phenomenon, which itself entails various understandings of antinomies like gradable, complementary and relational,⁹¹⁸ it is important to notice that it contributed to reformulations of some key concepts in theology, philosophy and the arts, but also influenced conceptualization of sciences in a broader sense. The spirit of that time is readily discernable in Samuel Coleridge's journal entry, where, drawing on the

⁹¹⁶ Burwick, *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections*, p. 50.

⁹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹¹⁸ See also Hegel's complex understanding of difference rendered into three related notions, namely, "absolute difference" [*der absolute Unterschied*], "diversity" [*Verschiedenheit*], and "opposition" [*Gegensatz*]; Jon Stewart, *The Cultural Crisis of the Danish Golden Age. Heiberg, Martensen and Kierkegaard*, Museum Tusulanum Press: Copenhagen 2015, pp. 241-4.

Classics, the German Romantics and the works of Hegel, he writes: “The Dyad is the essential form of Unity, the integral *one* would be put half manifest, in a single Pole—the manifested, i.e. realized One, therefore ipso termino, *exists* in and by self-duplication each duplicated being an Integer, and an Alter at Idem, and the real Image of the other.”⁹¹⁹

Following that understanding, God, from being *ipse sui similis* and *aliorum dissimilis*, is being translated into the one that is different but similar, which means that his difference is qualified by his similarity rendered *via negativa*. This means that God’s difference is far from being absolute, but is indeed relative to what God is different to, like people, nature and thought (reason). Kierkegaard dismisses this claim by showing that God’s difference is indistinguishable to reason. Following Louis Mackay’s rendering of Climacus’ “difference” in *Philosophical Fragments*,

The absolutely different is indistinguishable from the absolutely same. There is no mark by which it may be known and therefore none by which it may be discriminated. The other-than-reason is that which in principle is contained in rational category and which nonetheless is categorized as nonrational by this statement.⁹²⁰

By virtue of this understanding, Climacus says, “the god has become the most terrible deceiver through the understanding’s [*Fordstanden*] deception of itself”⁹²¹ that it can break through the difference of God. Since we can only know the difference through revelation, difference is a Christian category. It is however also an existential notion, because it both qualifies other notions like eternity and temporality, immediacy and reflection, ideality and actuality, and our relationship to God, nature and to other human beings.

The lack of difference impinges upon the relationship between people and between people and God. Kierkegaard notices in his *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, “People compare themselves with one another and each generation compares itself with the other so that comparison piles up in a great mass over our

⁹¹⁹ Samuel T. Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. IV, part 1, ed. by Kathleen Coburn, London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1957, p. 4829.

⁹²⁰ Louis H. Mackey, “A Ram in the Afternoon: Kierkegaard’s Discourse of the Other,” in his *Points of Views: Reading of Kierkegaard*, Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986, p. 204.

⁹²¹ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 46 (SKS 4, 250); David F. Swenson’s translation of *Forstanden* is “the Reason.”

heads.”⁹²² At first glance, comparing presupposes difference, but a more detailed investigation shows that the difference that is being established in that case is in fact a relative concept based on a degree of similarity. This is a precarious phenomenon; as pursuing non-difference leads to indifference and disinterestedness in relation to oneself and the world, but also leads us back to nature, where difference pertains only to species, not individuals within them.⁹²³ Moreover, difference is important for Christianity, which does not preoccupy itself with distinguishing “dissimilarity between difference and difference, this comparing dissimilarity.”⁹²⁴ Kierkegaard reiterates, “For by being a Christian he is not exempt from the differences, but by triumphing over the temptation of the differences, he becomes [a] Christian.”⁹²⁵ When Climacus says in the *Postscript* that no difference makes any difference, he refers to the fact that the nineteenth century in particular abandoned difference by reformulating it into something else—what is left is an empty concept.⁹²⁶

As I have already indicated at the beginning of this chapter, “Spirit is precisely: not to be like others,” for Kierkegaard.⁹²⁷ Here being like other entails comparison because to know what others are and whether one is indeed like others, we have to engage our ability to reason and recognition to eventually find correspondence between the others and ourselves. There is also an important link between comparison and the theological-spiritual realm shared between human beings and God. At stake here is the fact that “comparison” is not a value-neutral notion, but a negatively valued imitative practice or inclination, which pertains to the spiritual dimension of human being.

On the one hand, by imitating others we compromise or frustrate our spiritual dimension, because, “Spirit is precisely: not to be like others.” By imitating others, who likewise imitate others, we dilute the quality that make the very us in us. On the other hand, we also redirect our attention from the inward of our being to the outward. We become what we are not, or rather, we become someone else; as we know, these

⁹²² Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, p. 189 (SKS 8, 286-7).

⁹²³ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p. 230 (SKS 9, 231).

⁹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71 (SKS 9, 78). See also Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 56 (SKS 4, 250). “But this difference cannot be grasped securely (“hold fast” in Swenson’s translation of the work: see Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, transl. by David F. Swenson, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1962, p. 56). If the difference cannot be grasped securely (“held fast” in Swenson’s transl.) because there is no distinguishing mark, then, as with all such dialectical opposites, so it is with the difference and the likeness—they are identical.”

⁹²⁵ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p. 70 (SKS 9, 77).

⁹²⁶ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript I*, p. 356 (SKS 7, 325).

⁹²⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Moment*, p. 344 (SKS 13, 408).

issues make the central theme of Anti-Climacus's *The Sickness Unto Death*. In stark contrast, our mimetic relation with God does not have the same dimension here. Because God is in Her nature absolutely different from anything there is but God, our relation to God does not make us into one, but rather instructs us to secure our difference. Consequently, drawing upon the fact that we are both created in the image of God and that we are becoming that image, our task is to become ourselves what can only occur by upholding that spiritual realm in us, namely difference. In that sense, becoming oneself is re-presenting God.

However, comparison has to be comprehended in a dialectical manner, because not being like others may be in fact motivated by what it tries to avoid, namely, mimeticism. In the second of his *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, "The Tax Collector," Kierkegaard discusses two levels of harmful or negative *mimesis*. In that work, which is based on Luke 16, we have the tax collector who God justifies and the Pharisee who leaves the temple accused by God. Interestingly, the latter is the one who claims that he is not like the other, but it is he who is "the hypocrite who deceives himself and wants to deceive God."⁹²⁸ The Pharisee's claim of being different from another is in fact based on his adhering to "the criterion of human comparison."⁹²⁹ It is so, because he uses other people as his point of reference in evaluating his spiritual condition. In contrast, the tax collector downcasts his gaze, and does not look either towards the sky, or to the sides; being before God, he is too humble to look up, and not interested in looking side ways. Abstaining from a horizontal gaze, he secures the intimacy of "standing by himself," looking downwards and "staying far away," the tax collector admits his sin and relies on God's mercy.

The second type of comparing-fashioning form of *mimesis* is the one, which is being "performed," or "acted out" by shrewd readers of the story. Although they "have chosen the tax collector as their prototype, ...[they] resemble the Pharisee [*der ligne Pharisæeren*]."⁹³⁰ This is to say that in their choice to be like the tax collector ("they nevertheless fashion their character in the likeness of the tax collector" [*medens de dog danne deres Skikkelse i Lighed med Tolderen*]), they imitate the attitude of the Pharisee; they become contaminated with comparison and

⁹²⁸ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 127 (SKS 11, 263).

⁹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129 (SKS 11, 265).

⁹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 127 (SKS 11, 263).

“sanctimoniously say, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like this Pharisee.’”⁹³¹ These readers of the biblical story are also guilty of making their faith into a performance; with exaggerated gestures they mimic the behaviour of one they condemn, the Pharisee, and in fact condemn themselves.

Giving it a broader historical and intellectual outlook, Kierkegaard’s insistence upon the non-comparing difference echoes Haufniensis’ judgment upon his times, according to which “[t]he age of making distinctions is past.”⁹³² This is not merely a sentiment longing for the times when intellectuals used the tool of discernment more often than Kierkegaard’s contemporaries or an indirect attack on the Hegelians and the romantics, but as I contend, a prelude to a certain way of communicating and a method of writing and reading a text, namely “inversion.”

It comes as no surprise that Kierkegaard uses the term inversion [*Omvendtheden*] many times in different contexts.⁹³³ The meaning I am drawing upon is the one from Kierkegaard’s journal entry with the eponymous title. In that puzzling passage from 1852, Kierkegaard notes a particular trait of Socrates’ communication and elaborates that its comprehension requires radical change in one’s customary ways of thinking. This difference is a form of movement that is in its essence counterintuitive and perplexing. Kierkegaard says:

“inversion was characteristic of Socrates even in his time, but of course a whole quality lower than in Christianity, a developed philosophy of inversion

⁹³¹ *Ibid.*

⁹³² Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p. 3 (SKS 4, 310).

⁹³³ To some extent, it seems, Kierkegaard changes the usage of the word in his oeuvre from a rather pejorative in the first authorship, to the more positive in the latter authorship. For example, in a journal entry from 1854 (Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 3, p. 118, entry 2573 (SKS 26, 284)), entitled “God’s Majesty,” the author employs “inversion” in positive sense—it is that which describes the paradox of the suffering God that “humanely speaking” makes the beloved unhappy (“But here again we have the sign of the sphere of paradox, the marks of inversion [*Omvendthedens Kjender*]”). Strikingly, in the same entry, Kierkegaard condemns discussing human’s tendency to “he makes God in his image.” Here we would normally find the term “inversion” in the sense that corresponds with the one engaged in earlier entries from 1847 like “unholy inversion [*Bagvendthed*]” (*Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 102, entry 1358 (SKS 20, 220, NB2:205)) or “repulsive inversion [*afskyelige Omvendthed*]” (*Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 415, entry 948 (SKS 20, 210, NB 2:174)). What is remarkable in this context, Kierkegaard uses the term in question to describe our relationship to Christ as the Prototype in a journal entry from 1852. What Walsh has already hinted upon in Chapter One in her concept of “inverse dialectic,” Kierkegaard notices that by getting closer to the Prototype, we are actually realizing how far we are from Him. He says, “But God is protected, for the closer you come to him the lower you become—that is, the nearer you come to him the more infinite a concept you get of his infinite sublimity, but thereby you are lowered. ‘He must increase, but I must decrease’ is the law for all drawing near to God...But to be protected by the law of inversion—that to come closer is to get farther away [*Men ved Omvendthedens Lov, at være sikkret, at Tilnærmelsen er Fjernelsen*]: infinite majesty!” (*Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 138, entry 1432 (SKS 25, 140, NB27:23)). The law of drawing near to God is the law of inversion.

Aelianus (in *Variæ historiæ*) tells of an artist who was commissioned to paint a rolling horse. The artist painted a horse in full jump. When the owner complained and said that was not what he had ordered, the artist replied: Turn the picture upside down and you will have what you asked for. This, says Aelianus, is the way Socrates talks; he must be understood inversely. This is excellent! When I wrote my dissertation on irony I had not read Aelianus, but how remarkable that nobody brought him to my attention!⁹³⁴

Kierkegaard here is bewildered (“This is excellent!”) with Aelianus’ account of Socrates’ mode of living, thinking and speaking. The fact he finds it very pertinent to what he discusses in his doctoral thesis may instantly bring a conclusion that what we are dealing here is another account of irony. However, as we find in another journal entry jotted in close proximity with this one, Kierkegaard hints at something more, namely a different hermeneutics. He says: “Socrates always talked only about food and drink—but basically he was always talking about and always thinking about the infinite.”⁹³⁵ Socrates’s communication is not just ironic here, but rather aims at a different attitude in reading and understanding. His communication is juxtaposed with of “others [who] always talk about the infinite, and in the loftiest tones, but basically they are always talking and always thinking about food and drink, money, profit.”⁹³⁶ What is at work here is “a developed philosophy of inversion.” We need to approach Socrates in a very different way to our normal way of reasoning—he “must be understood inversely.” But what does it in fact mean for Kierkegaard?

If we briefly return to the introductory note from *The Concept of Anxiety*, we find Haufniensis referring to Socrates as the one who “expressed both in his words and life...the peculiar distinction...‘between what he understood and what he did not understand.’”⁹³⁷ This primarily takes us back again to the wise man of Athens who always clearly noted that *sub specie aeterni* could only be accessible to gods. By that virtue, he is the lover of beauty, what we already indicated in this chapter. On the other hand, we have the thinker using the method of questioning and discernment as his default mode of investigation. This elenctic manner of reasoning, although based on distinctions, was not precise as it engaged analyses of terms that have no clearly

⁹³⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 217, entry 4289 (SKS 24, 483, NB25:66).

⁹³⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 218, entry 4290 (SKS 24, 489, NB25:70).

⁹³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹³⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p. 3 (SKS 4, 310).

defined meanings. What we find in a journal entry from 1850, the method of discernment *per se* is not the case here: “frightful those the recklessness with which the philosophers and the like introduce differentiating categories like genius, talent, etc. into religion. They have no intimation that religion is thereby abolished.”⁹³⁸ At stake is a new mode of thinking, where the inability of possessing the absolute knowledge is the true knowledge. The point of arrival in the quest for knowledge is in fact the point of departure for that search. The idea that the lack of knowledge is knowledge is not irony, although it is a form of a paradox, but a deeply existential thought.

Putting it differently, the difference between Socrates and others is that he knows that he does not know. On the one hand, neither Socrates nor his interlocutors know the absolute truth; on the other hand Socrates’ point of departure is their point of arrival. To make that very difference between him and his interlocutors intelligible (to them), Socrates has to make them abandon their unsuccessful way of thinking, and adapt a new mode of reasoning. What is then what Socrates “did not understand” and what is so important for our investigation? It is faith and the realm of gods. Plato’s dialogues that feature the wise man of Athens discuss the transcendent world of ideas and gods, but do not come with fixed and certain knowledge about their modes of existence and operation. Moreover, although the thinker often speaks of the ethical dimension of life, the main premise of that is the necessity of existing in close relations with the world of gods and ideas (good, beauty, love), which is the practical life.

In a similar manner we find Kierkegaard defining what Christianity is and who a Christian is. In doing so Kierkegaard presents himself as a poet, as someone without authority, but as one who both has an intimation of what things are and what they are not. In that sense, Kierkegaard as a poet is more than a negative thinker. Scholars have extensively discussed the subject of Kierkegaard as a poet and the poetic dimension of his writings—I will not attempt a comprehensive account of these matters.⁹³⁹ With a short exposition of the poet in Kierkegaard, I will point out those aspects of the poetic in Kierkegaard that either have not been discussed or have not

⁹³⁸ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 1, p. 446, entry 1017 (SKS 23, 19; NB15:19).

⁹³⁹ On the poet in Kierkegaard’s authorship see Bruce H. Kirmmse, “Poetry, History—and Kierkegaard,” *Kierkegaard Yearbook Studies*, 2010, pp. 49-68 and Louis Mackey’s *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1971.

been discussed in the context of difference; thus I will avoid arguing already analyzed subjects.

Kierkegaard's poet (and Kierkegaard as a poet) is a very complex figure. Both *Either/Or* and *Stages on the Life's Way* indicate that the poet is the unhappy one who composes the beautiful through the suffering and anguish.⁹⁴⁰ A poet, as we read more into Kierkegaard's later works, is someone who although he "understands" Christianity in the form of a certain intuition, does not venture into what Christianity is about, but has only the ability to "describe faith."⁹⁴¹ The poet is an observer who investigates oneself and other people and their behaviors. The poet knows more than others do, he goes beyond the finite and his "area of specialization" is the realm of possibilities and ideas.⁹⁴² His communication is not direct and a key is needed to comprehend it. What the poet communicates in the given text is not what the reader considers in the first place; the real communication is the communication in difference. The reader has to be alerted to irony, textual paradoxes and logical contradictions, and be able to see the difference between an appearance and the real.

Two examples of the poetics of difference, or philosophy of inversion, are the well-known parabolic stories from *Either/Or*. The first story talks about a situation that takes place in a theatre, where a clown communicates to the audience that fire broke out behind the stage and their lives are endangered. Because the context of the theatre and the outfit of the clown mislead the audience, they do not take the communication seriously and laugh. The second story talks about a sign that is displayed in a shop window, stating "Pressing Done Here." The author elaborates, "If a person were to bring his clothes to be pressed, he would be duped, for the sign is merely for sale."⁹⁴³ Both the audience and customer are deceived by the context, which shapes their reading. They failed to distinguish appearance from reality; only a

⁹⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, *Either-Or I*, p. 19 (SKS 2, 27) and Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, p. 404 (SKS 6, 375).

⁹⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination. Judge for Yourselves!* p. 18 (SKS 13, 47). " 'Yes, but if you would only read one of my books you will see how I can describe faith; so I know that I must have it.' 'I do believe the man is crazy. If it is true that you are able to describe faith, that merely shows that you are a poet, and if you do it well, that you are a good poet—anything but that you are a believer.' "

⁹⁴² Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard Journals and Notebooks*, vol. 1, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2007, p. 243 (SKS 17, 252, DD:96a). "This morning I saw a half a score of wild geese fly away in the crisp cool air; they were right overhead at first and then farther and farther away, and at last they separated into two flocks, like two eyebrows over my eyes, which now gazed into the land of poetry."

⁹⁴³ Kierkegaard, *Either-Or I*, p. 32 (SKS 2, 41).

different reading would save the lives of the audience and the time and effort of the shopper.

On a less ironic note in *The Sickness Unto Death*, Anti-Climacus, trying to explain what despair is, asks readers to abandon their customary way of thinking. And indeed, understanding that one is in despair is something that cannot be effortlessly grasped. Following the author, our visit at the doctor results from our feeling sick. He says, “As a rule, a person is considered to be healthy when he himself does not say that he is sick, not to mention when he himself says that he is well. But the physician has a *different* view of sickness.”⁹⁴⁴ Anti-Climacus’ physician knows that happiness may be a concealed despair.⁹⁴⁵ What is important, the doctor’s mode of approaching the disease is *different* from her patients. To know what despair is, we have to move beyond “the customary view of despair...go beyond appearances, and...superficial view, that is, no view at all.”⁹⁴⁶

Most apt example of Kierkegaard’s philosophy of inversion we find in already-discussed pseudonymous essay, “Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?” Although the work openly gives a negative answer to its eponymous question, it itself hints upon something opposite, a reversed solution to the essay’s eponymous question. Yet H.H. directly declares that a human being is not eligible to let himself be sacrificed to reclaim the truth, and it appears that H.H. is dead. Is he a martyr? One can take note of the *Two Ethical-Religious Essays* as his posthumous work. In the preface, H.H. announces that understanding of the essay requires from the reader “laying aside his customary mode of thinking.” This suggests that the essay is therefore about something quite different what we may initially think of it. A journal entry that comments upon the essays defines the expected hermeneutics as being in fact related to the movement of difference. “The difference is like the difference when one turns a drawing sideways.”⁹⁴⁷ Perhaps then one should try to look at the given answer from a “reversed position?”⁹⁴⁸ Jacob Bøggild, commenting on Kierkegaard’s work, asks: “Does the text revoke itself in order to preserve the reader’s freedom or in order to leave the backdoor open for what

⁹⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, p. 23 (SKS 11, 139).

⁹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25 (SKS 11, 141). “To be sure, it is happiness, but happiness is not a qualification of spirit, and deep, deep within the most secret hiding place of happiness there dwells also anxiety, which is despair; it very much wishes to be allowed to remain there, because for despair the most cherished and desirable place to live is in the heart of happiness.”

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22 (SKS 11, 139).

⁹⁴⁷ SKS 20, 203, NB2:156.a (quoted after Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 211).

⁹⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *Without Authority*, p. 53 (SKS 11, 59).

it explicitly prohibits: becoming a martyr?” The essay communicates what is not explicitly said, but it does it differently. Considering the possible martyrdom of H.H., the answer to the essay is silence, the different mode of communication. This somber outcome is piquantly paired with the conclusive part of the essay delivered in a light-minded and non-demanding mood. This ending part of the essay however pointing to some type of conclusiveness is in fact not concluding at all; on the contrary. Quoting at length:

Since the whole thing is fiction, “a poetical venture,” but, note well, by a thinker, the thoughtful reader will surely find it appropriate that I say nothing about this man; just because it is a fiction I can indeed say one thing as another, can say exactly what I wish. In another respect also, I can, inasmuch as the whole thing is a fiction say exactly what I wish with regard to his life, how he fared, what he became in the world. But just because I *qua* poet have a poet’s absolute power to say what I wish, I will in all these respects say nothing, in order not to contribute, by speaking about the novelistic aspects, to drawing the reader’s attention away from what is essential, the thought content.⁹⁴⁹

The poetic manner of communication invites the reader to challenge the text. The mirror of this text does not merely give the onlooker a disinterested reflection of oneself—waiting whether the one sees oneself in the mirror or not—but invites her to be puzzled by it and to wrestle with it. Following Kierkegaard’s quotation from Lichtenberg evoked at the beginning of *Stages on Life’s Way*: “Such works are mirrors: when an ape looks in, no apostle can look out.”⁹⁵⁰

The main goal of this concluding chapter was to re-read Kierkegaard’s imitation taking on board results of my investigations from preceding parts of my thesis. As I have demonstrated, reading the phenomenon in question from the perspective of *mimesis* reveals its essential relationship with other facets of that concept: representation, emulation, and enactment. Moreover, a unique rendering of it in Kierkegaard’s writings comes into view, namely existential *mimesis*. Kierkegaard’s existential *mimesis* encompasses an understanding of imitation as non-imitative and

⁹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-9 (SKS 11, 93).

⁹⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life’s way*, p. 8 (SKS 6, 16).

as such addresses contentious questions identified in Chapter One, such as the “substance” and “method” of imitation in the imitation of Christ, but also the problems of suffering and martyrdom it entails. Moreover, it comprises the existential-mimetic notions of redoubling, reduplication and double reflection discussed in the previous chapter and has representational dimension as analyzed in Chapter Three. Additionally, existential *mimesis* is concerned with intention-driven and indirect imitation. Hence, comprehended as a cure, existential *mimesis* is a response to the problematic *mimesis* one finds in direct imitation that is concerned with detailed representation of an action or object and disregards the intention behind them.

The idea of *mimesis* being the problem and the cure is being carried further in my discussion of Kierkegaard’s take on comparison. I showed that Kierkegaard affirms two types of imitation, one that seeks likeness with Christ and the other that tries to avoid likeness with other human beings, namely comparison. These two are necessarily interrelated, (an idea which seems to stand contrary to the prevailing interpretation of Kierkegaard’s imitation presented in the opening chapter of this research); they also determine genuineness of a human being. By situating him in a broader historical-philosophical context of his contemporaries, I indicated that Kierkegaard participates in the mimetic discussion on difference, criticizing its dismissal as a fundamental philosophical and theological category. The annihilation of differences between people and between them and God tacitly redefines standards for imitation from indirect to direct. This means that by proving that God is similar to us, which is by making the difference between the two relative, not absolute, we can in fact imitate him directly. So understood imitation contradicts with the spirit of the moderns, and acts against their initial motivation, which was breaking up with slavish imitation like mimicking, copying, etc.

Additionally, I “rehabilitated” Kierkegaard’s image by referring to two renderings of it in Plato and Marion, *icon* and *idol*. Necessarily related to the mirror, Kierkegaard’s image is a means of conceptualizing oneself necessary for human becoming. This is to say that both image and mirror allow one to see oneself as different, and so comprehended, make development within and of the self possible. Lastly, I demonstrated that his mirror, image, difference, inversion are all deeply interrelated mimetic concepts that simultaneously qualify and transform the readers

relation with Kierkegaard's text allowing for a more nuanced and subjective reading of it.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation began by introducing the dominant renderings of Kierkegaard's employment of, and engagement with *mimesis*, found primarily in various scholarly considerations of imitation in his writings. For the most part, imitation in Kierkegaard is read in relation to his consideration of the imitation of Christ. It is therefore a common belief that Kierkegaard's interest in imitation as a concept is rather scarce; this idea to an extent warrants the conviction that Kierkegaard's possible attention to *mimesis* must be remote, if not merely implausible. Additionally, if not deeply "unintentional," Kierkegaard's account of the concept in question, being merely a (subservient) part of his larger project of religious existence, a means to something greater, is on its own terms profoundly idiosyncratic, hence, bears little meaning on the contemporary discussion of *mimesis*.

My analysis of Kierkegaard's "second authorship" has proven otherwise. First, I have challenged the dominant appraisal of imitation in Kierkegaard as privileging one mimetic model, thus showing that his consideration of the problem, although situated in a theological conversation, goes beyond the phenomenon of *imitatio Christi*. I put forward the idea that an analysis of the genealogy of Kierkegaard's "following after" [*Efterfølgelse*] discloses its Socratic, therefore non-Christian dimension. In sum, as I showed, Christ, but also "the ideal self," "the ideal picture of a Christian," Kierkegaard himself as the negative model, "the lily and the bird," Job, "the woman who was a sinner," and finally Socrates, serve as Kierkegaard's mimetic models.

I demonstrated that Kierkegaard was an active participant in the fundamental intellectual discussion of *mimesis* among his early and late contemporaries, contributing a unique understanding of modern aesthetics and a convincing account of human creativity and autonomy. By situating Kierkegaard and his production in a broader historical, literary and philosophical context, I rehabilitated his literary works as a significant part of the ongoing discourse on *mimesis*.

Kierkegaard's attentiveness to *mimesis* transcends its imitative dimension by taking on board its two other fundamental facets, namely, representation and emulation (enactment and performance). Hence, consideration of the "how," as opposed to the "what," of his ideas in his writings unveils the representational

dimension of Kierkegaard's authorship that is neither value-neutral, nor unintentional; rather it is inseparable from the communicated content.

I presented the complexity of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard's "second authorship" as encompassing the notions of imitation, representation, but also enactment, emulation and performance in his autobiographical remarks on the formation of his own self. Examined from the perspective of narrative studies, narrative identity and studies in autobiography, Kierkegaard's autobiographical remarks do not merely express his inner self, but prescribe and construct it. Moreover (overlooked in this context), Kierkegaard's existential categories of redoubling, reduplication and double reflection function as forms of existential *mimesis of transformation*, which I find in mimetic construals of the human self embedded in his accounts of "the man in man" fundamental to that transformation.

Moreover, I showed that Kierkegaard does not merely use or criticize *mimesis*, but also offers a very unique rendering of the concept I termed existential *mimesis*. Essentially, existential *mimesis* encompasses four interrelated factors. First, it is "non-imitative" in the sense presented in Tate's account of imitation in Plato's *Republic*. Simply put, it defies the idea of imitating the other in the sense of "making oneself as another," which Kierkegaard terms aping. Second, existential *mimesis* is intention-driven, as it is not concerned with a detailed representation/imitation of an action or object, but with the intention that stands behind them. Thirdly, "non-imitative" and intention driven *mimesis* is indirect. In that sense, existential *mimesis* does not succumb to comparison and the value of appearances, seeking difference by reflectively transcending mimetic models. Lastly, it is "refigurative," as it involves both creating an image of oneself and then redoubling it in the real world.

Existential *mimesis* in Kierkegaard entails mimetic selfhood and mimetic dimensions of human being and doing in the world. I demonstrated that the Dane understands the human self as a reflexive, interpretative, relational and dynamic image. Kierkegaard's image redefines the relation between "the original" and its representation, rehabilitating the latter as fully valuable and meaningful—contrasting the dominant metaphysical rendering of representation as subservient, incomplete and suspect—and by employing mental imagery as an important component of human becoming.

These findings, as such limited gravely to Kierkegaard's "second authorship," raise some pregnant questions regarding Kierkegaard's thought as a whole and open

avenues for a more nuanced and complex analysis of the meaning of his legacy for us today. I would like to just signal some of them in this concluding part of my thesis. As for the former, the essential question is: what is the relation between Kierkegaard's existential *mimesis* and his concept of approximation? What is the role of imagination in existential *mimesis*? How should we read Kierkegaard's pseudonymous and anonymous authorship in light of his endorsement of Plato's criticism of "speaking in someone's voice"? Is existential *mimesis* always reflective and conscious?

On the other hand, what are the implications of Kierkegaard's existential *mimesis* to contemporary understandings of human selfhood? How does Kierkegaard's mimetic account of human being and doing in the world inform human agency and autonomy? What is the moral dimension of comparison and exemplarity? Is there a mimetic ethics?

The push for such a systematic research of *mimesis* in Kierkegaard is a necessary one, and one that will hopefully inspire more scholarship in its vein, and others beyond it, with the ultimate goal being understanding of human being, becoming and doing in the world. That said, I strongly believe that a good rendering of Kierkegaard's existential *mimesis* and his mimetic self both in the complex (and to some extent idiosyncratic) world of Kierkegaard, but especially outside of that world, can be fruitful and beneficial for a better understanding of modern man. Additionally, Kierkegaard's "non-imitative," indirect, intention-driven and "refigurative" *mimesis* exercised by a mimetic self may inform other disciplines by providing a theoretical framework for their research on cognition, agency, but also learning, development and social behavior.

Though these questions remain, the investigation so far has established without a doubt that Kierkegaard's engagement with and development of the critically important topic of *mimesis* are far more profound than previously suspected, and future scholarship will have to contend with the unique contribution he made to this field.

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