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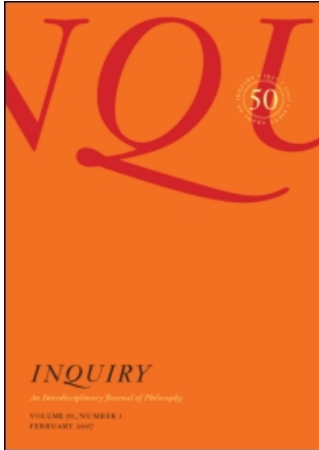
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# Kierkegaard's Mirrors: The Immediacy of Moral Vision

PATRICK STOKES

*University of Melbourne, Australia*

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**ABSTRACT** *This paper explores Kierkegaard's recurrent use of mirrors as a metaphor for various aspects of moral imagination and vision. While a writer centrally concerned with issues of self-examination, selfhood and passionate subjectivity might well be expected to be attracted to such metaphors, there are deeper reasons why Kierkegaard is drawn to this analogy. The specifically visual aspects of the mirror metaphor reveal certain crucial features of Kierkegaard's model of moral cognition. In particular, the felicity of the metaphors of the "mirror of possibility" in *Sickness Unto Death* and the "mirror of the Word" in *For Self-Examination* depend upon a normative phenomenology of moral vision, one in which the success of moral agency depends upon an immediate, non-reflective self-referentiality built into vision itself. To "see oneself in the mirror" rather than simply seeing the mirror itself is to see the moral content of the world as immediately "about" oneself in a sense that goes beyond the conceptual content of what is perceived. These metaphors gesture towards a model of perfected moral agency where vision becomes co-extensive with volition. I conclude by suggesting directions in which explication of this model may contribute to discussions in contemporary moral psychology.*

A key advance in Kierkegaard studies in recent years, driven largely by the work of M. Jamie Ferreira,<sup>1</sup> has been an increased awareness of the interplay of volitional and non-volitional elements in Kierkegaard's model of moral psychology. This has helped to sophisticate our picture of Kierkegaard away from the irrationalist caricatures of the past<sup>2</sup> towards a far richer and more nuanced understanding. This particularly applies to the nature of qualitative transitions, such as those between the 'stages' of existence, and the broader Kierkegaardian concept of the "leap". This concept, easily (and frequently) misconstrued as a category of arbitrary,

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*Correspondence Address:* Patrick Stokes, Department of Philosophy, University of Melbourne VIC 3010, Australia. Email: [pastokes@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:pastokes@unimelb.edu.au)

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radically undetermined decision, has been compellingly re-cast as a complex and irreducible interplay of free will and compulsion, “something curiously active yet passive”.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, there has been an increasing emphasis on “vision” or “perception” (broadly understood) as a key description of Kierkegaardian moral cognition, as exemplified in different ways by Ferriera, Robert C. Roberts,<sup>4</sup> and Rick Anthony Furtak.<sup>5</sup> This shift in emphasis has brought into view respects in which Kierkegaard shares much with modern philosophers (such as Iris Murdoch) for whom ways of *seeing* or construing, rather than making judgements or reaching decisions, are the central features of moral experience.

This tension between volitional and non-volitional aspects in perception and decision plays a central role in an important and recurrent Kierkegaardian metaphor: the mirror. Few philosophers have displayed as masterful a command of metaphor as Kierkegaard. This command consists in both a remarkable capacity for generating analogy and a keen awareness of its limitations; a sense of both its capacity to illuminate and to mislead.<sup>6</sup> Among the rich variety of metaphoric figures that Kierkegaard marshals to illustrate various elements of moral and religious experience, mirrors are a particularly important, if rarely discussed, figurative device. Kierkegaard's writings are peppered with figures such as the “mirror of possibility” and “mirror of the Word”, while texts, ethics and contradiction are all variously described as or likened to mirrors. To a certain extent, the felicity of mirror metaphors to a writer crucially concerned with the self's relation to ethico-religious knowledge and the irreducibly subjective dimensions of thought and experience is obvious. Insofar as Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works in particular draw the reader into a subjective confrontation with the text, one in which their own relation to the content of the text is central to its appropriation, the illustrative “pull” of the image of the mirror is clear.

However, in what follows I will argue that the specifically *visual* features of these mirror metaphors also reveal certain crucial features of Kierkegaardian moral cognition more generally. The discussions of the “mirrors” of possibility in *Sickness Unto Death* and the “mirror of the Word” in *For Self-Examination* depend upon a normative phenomenology of moral vision, one in which the success of moral agency depends upon an immediate, non-reflective self-referentiality built into vision itself. These metaphors serve to locate Kierkegaardian moral psychology in a decidedly perceptualist vein, and gesture towards a model of perfected moral agency where vision becomes co-extensive with volition. The tension discussed above between the volitional and non-volitional sits at the very heart of vision, and as such this model will be very different from both deterministic accounts of moral psychology and traditional accounts in which moral thought is essentially a process of making judgements and decisions. I will conclude by suggesting directions in which explication of this model may contribute to discussions in contemporary moral psychology.

### I. Self-Recognition and the mirror of possibility

In *The Sickness Unto Death*'s extended discussion of the interplay of possibility and necessity in the synthesis of polar opposites that comprises the self, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Anti-Climacus deploys the metaphor of the "mirror of possibility":

Even in seeing oneself in a mirror it is necessary to recognise oneself, for if one does not, one does not see oneself but only a human being. The mirror of possibility is no ordinary mirror; it must be used with extreme caution, for, in the highest sense, this mirror does not tell the truth. That a self appears to be such and such in the possibility of itself is only a half-truth, for in the possibility of itself the self is still far from or is only half of itself. (SUD, 37)<sup>7</sup>

Here, the mirror metaphor follows naturally from talk of the self "reflecting itself" in possibility – that is, generating representations of its own possibility to itself. In the exercise of imagination a person 'gives' herself ideal representations of herself which she can actualise or reject. As M. Jamie Ferreira has noted,<sup>8</sup> for Kierkegaard, imagination (understood here as "infinite reflection") is a double-edged sword; whilst a capacity to generate possibilities is a necessary condition of ethical agency, imagination is equally capable of leading us away from the concrete realm of cares and responsibilities altogether. Kierkegaard, anticipating Murdoch,<sup>9</sup> understands that imagination and fantasy can be tools for distracting ourselves from the demands and claims placed upon us by our environment. Yet elsewhere, most prominently in the second volume of *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard's "ethical" sphere spokesman Judge William acknowledges that without imagination, moral agency becomes impossible. What is at issue in this metaphor of the "mirror of possibility", then, is circumscribing the infinite power of imagination by retaining a concrete relation between the imager and what they imagine. Such a "grounding" of the infinite power of imagination allows the self to:

...continually become proportionately as concrete as it is abstract [...] so that in being infinite it comes back to itself in the most rigorous sense, so that when furthest away from itself (when it is most infinite in purpose and determination), it is simultaneously and personally closest to carrying out the infinitely small part of the work that can be accomplished this very day, this very hour, this very moment. (SUD, 32)

It is significant that Anti-Climacus couches his concern for maintaining a connection between the objects of imagination and the imagining self in

language of *self-recognition*. In *Sickness*, Anti-Climacus develops a Hegel-like dialectic of self-recognition, analogous to the 'Dialectic of Recognition' Arne Grøn has shown to be at work in *Works of Love*.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, there is a persistent concern in *Sickness* with the cognitive conditions necessary for self-recognition, for being able to see *oneself* in imaginary, ideal and comparative representations of oneself. Being essentially, as Merold Westphal has put it, a work of clinical psychology,<sup>11</sup> *Sickness* concerns itself more with descriptions of dysfunctional selves than of "healthy" ones, and accordingly it contains some striking examples of the failure to recognize oneself in ways that are inimical to the actualisation of ethical selfhood. In denouncing selves who take themselves (implicitly at least) to be nothing but the sum of their "externalities" (social roles, rank, relationships etc), Anti-Climacus notes that radical changes in these externalities volatilise the self in ways that find expression in an inability to recognise oneself in these altered circumstances. He notes that the despair of "the person of immediacy" often leads to a desire to "become someone else, [get himself] a new self. Well, what if he did become someone else? I wonder whether he would recognise himself" (SUD, 53). Similarly,

The question of immortality has often occupied him, and more than once he has asked the pastor whether there is such an immortality, whether one would actually recognise himself again- something that certainly must be of very particular interest to him, since he has no self. (SUD, 56)

Here, the absence of any 'deeper' self, the lack of "spirit" – that is, a reflexive self that knows itself to be more than the sum of its external relations – leads to a crisis of self-recognition. Deprived of the surface-level determinations that the self took itself to be, it cannot 'see' itself in any idealised version of itself where such determinants have changed. Accordingly, the continuity necessary for concrete moral agency cannot be attained.

If "vision" appears too strong (or simply too metaphorical) to describe the process of self-recognition in these examples, the same cannot be said of Anti-Climacus' most striking example of the failure of self-recognition, the drunken peasant:

There is a story about a peasant who went barefooted to town with enough money to buy himself a pair of stockings and shoes and to get drunk, and in trying to find his way home in his drunken state, he fell asleep in the middle of the road. A carriage came along, and the driver shouted to him to move or he would drive over his legs. The drunken peasant woke up, looked at his legs and, not recognising them because of the shoes and stockings, said: "Go ahead, they are not my legs." (SUD, 53)

This failure is precisely a failure of vision. The peasant reacts to the coachman's warning immediately, but what is lacking in the peasant's response is not something that would normally be supplied by deliberation, even longer or more rigorous deliberation. The standard against which we judge the peasant here is not one of intelligence or powers of reasoning.<sup>12</sup> Rather, the peasant fails to do what we would expect of him: to grasp his situation *immediately* and get out of the way. He should not have to think about what these stocking-clad objects in front of him are; rather, he should just see that they are his, or more generally, he should *see that he is in danger*. There is no underlying story about inference or deduction to be told here. The description of this event as a *failure to see* does not need to be analysed away into any more basic terms. The specific character of the *failure* here is simply this: the peasant sees legs without seeing that they are *his* legs.

This immediacy and decisiveness are not characteristic of deliberative reflection, but they are elements in the everyday experience of recognition. The experience of perceptual recognition is different to, for instance, the experience of using a list of known features to ascertain whether a photo is of a particular person. We do not, when we recognise someone normally, tick off a list of criteria to determine (inductively) who they are – it is only when we *cannot* recognise someone that we resort to this very different process of identification. Wittgenstein makes the point about recognition that it is not a process of comparing what we are looking at with some sort of mental representation, a reading-off of similarities between a template and an exemplar. For Wittgenstein, recognition is not experienced as a phenomenon of comparison, one that points to some external criterion; we see the object *as* what it is, without thereby referring to anything else outside the object:

605. And it is not so much as if I were comparing the object with a picture set beside it, but as if the object *coincided* with the picture. So I see only one thing, not two.<sup>13</sup>

The concept of the “leap” (a decisive qualitative transition which cannot be achieved gradually or through quantification) described in *Postscript* provides a useful template for conceptualizing what happens in recognition. The moment of recognition is a qualitative shift from seeing *something* to seeing something *as* what we recognise it to be.<sup>14</sup> This shift is both immediate (in that recognition is not incremental but instantaneous, however much cognitive ‘work’ has occurred before it) and qualitatively decisive.

The comic appeal of the peasant parable (and it is one of Kierkegaard's funnier moments) mainly rests upon the disjunction between the Peasant's object of consideration and his attitude towards it. If the Peasant failed to recognise someone *else's* legs the joke simply wouldn't work. The Peasant is

crucially involved in the situation in which he finds himself because he is co-identical with what he contemplates.<sup>15</sup> His attitude of unconcern therefore is completely inappropriate – this is not a situation he can reasonably be indifferent to. The drunken peasant does not recognise his own legs; as such, while he correctly identifies legs as being imperiled, he fails to see *himself* in what he is looking at.

Looking at oneself is therefore not the same as *seeing oneself*. One can look at oneself (literally, as in the Peasant example, or imaginatively, as in the case of positing possibilities for action) and yet not *see oneself*. This brings us back to the “mirror of possibility”, into which one must look in such a way as to see “oneself” rather than “a human being merely”. This mirror metaphor thus brings into focus the conditions necessary for cognition to maintain an essential connection to the subject’s concrete reality. Central to this is a mode of vision in which we *see ourselves* such that there is an immediate experience of co-identity with the imaginatively posited self. This is apparently necessary even where the “objective” content of my imaginings contains me. I may imagine a possibility that contains me (say, my responding to a present situation by undertaking some action) but I can still fail to “recognise myself”, that is, experience my co-identity with the “me” in this possibility. In such a case, I fail to maintain the connection between my lived reality and what I imagine. Such a self’s will has, according to Anti-Climacus, become “fantastic” (Danish *phantasiske*, punning on *Phantasie*, “imagination”).

The existence of such cases shows that self-recognition cannot simply be a matter of congruency or continuity between the imagined scenario in which I posit myself and my current circumstances, commitments and projects. We can indeed visualise scenarios which flow directly from our present situations, yet still not “see” ourselves in them. In such cases, the experience of identity which constitutes the difference between seeing oneself and seeing “only a human being” will consist in a certain subjective orientation to the image. Yet in both experiences, the imaginative *content* of the experience is precisely the same. If I ponder the possible grave consequences of my current behavior, I may imagine these consequences in precise and compelling detail. Yet in certain cases, this contemplation may be done in such a way that the fact of it being *me* who will suffer will be *essentially* missing from my contemplation, without any change in the content of what I imagine.<sup>16</sup> This deficiency is hard to express. The subjective difference between a detached “I will suffer for my present actions” and an earnest “*I* will suffer for my present actions” can only be broadly gestured to by emphasising the word “I”. What is essential to the latter experience goes beyond the conceptual content of the experience, and hence cannot be expressed directly. Yet like Hume struggling to put into words the difference between the subjective experiences of an idea and a belief,<sup>17</sup> we can at least point to where the difference lies and appeal to common experience.

Therefore, the basis of self-recognition cannot simply be the apprehension of the commonality of imagined and actual content. Nor does it turn on an apprehension of the practical possibility of the imagined scenario (I can, after all, recognise myself in representations of scenarios that are *not* possible, occasioning regret or relief as the case demands). Hence what is at issue in self-recognition is something more basic than the apprehension of shared *practical* identity with selves in imagined scenarios. This is implicit in the “man of immediacy’s” concern whether he can recognise himself in the afterlife described by Anti-Climacus mentioned above. If posthumous survival is conceived of as radically discontinuous with ante-mortem existence, the identity which the self recognises (or fails to recognise) cannot straightforwardly be practical identity. Recognition of *ourselves* must be more basic and less dependant upon content than the way we normally recognise others; in short, it must be an attitude of self-reflexivity built into our apprehension of a wide range of content which need not, in itself, have strong thematic interconnections.

Moreover, self-recognition in imagination in this sense is entirely immediate and non-reflective. There is no moment of stepping back from what is imagined to determine reflectively what relation it bears to me as a present-situated ethical agent. Just as, when we look in an actual mirror, we do not say to ourselves “that is me”, there is no thought that corresponds to such a locution in imagination. Thus, *this is me* never becomes *itself* an object of thought, but is, to borrow a Sartrean term, non-thetically implicit in my apprehension of myself. For Sartre, consciousness must be attended by “an immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself”,<sup>18</sup> implicit *in* or attendant upon each moment of consciousness without thereby forming part of the intentional, thetic content of consciousness. Were I not conscious of being conscious, I could not make my being conscious an object for subsequent reflection (rendering me incapable of answering questions like “what were you conscious of just then?”); but I must be *pre-reflectively* so if I am not to be caught in an infinite regress. In the same way, when we recognise ourselves in imagination, the intentional object of thought remains what I am doing or not doing in the imaginatively posited scenario. Self-recognition is, in this way, an immediate, non-reflective sense of co-identity with that which we contemplate.

The discussion above has argued that self-recognition, now understood as an immediate self-referentiality that allows us to non-thetically experience our co-identity with what we contemplate, is a key feature of moral imagination, essential to successful agency. If we cannot see *ourselves* in what we contemplate we do not sustain an essential connection between what we contemplate and our lived existence, the imagination becomes “fantastic” and the imagining self is carried away into the infinite without “coming back to itself” (SUD, 32). Importantly, this does not apply only to the positing of future possibilities, but also to recognition of how we are



now. We often make fairly critical self-assessments without fundamentally “inhabiting” these assessments. Consider the person who declares herself to be morally wanting in some significant respect, but then acts as if this assessment applied to some other person. In a sense this agent projects a vision of how she *is* morally, but her identification with this vision is too superficial to integrate it back into her lived existence by attempting to change (or at least deciding not to).

## II. The mirror as metaphor

Given this understanding of self-recognition, the choice of the mirror as a metaphoric illustration seems quite appropriate. The mirror represents the paradigmatic experience of self-recognition, where the self is literally seen, and where awareness of “what I look like” is generated and altered in an immediate way. Obviously, the experience *is* mediated on a physical level (through carefully arranged glass surfaces), but on the subjective level, the experience is immediate. We do not, under normal circumstances, stop to consider whether the mirror is accurate, or whether imperfections in its construction distort the image in it. We typically do not even notice that the image in the mirror is precisely that, a “mirror image”, inverted along its vertical axis. (This could simply be a product of familiarity with the experience of seeing ourselves in the mirror, or the fact that we only ever see our image in its inverted form. However, that we rarely notice the difference between how we look in the mirror and how we look in photographs suggests that the specifics of the image *qua* image are not what we attend to when looking at images of ourselves.) In the usual, unreflective run of things, we simply *see ourselves*, rather than an *image* of ourselves, and this apparent volatilization of the subject-object schema<sup>19</sup> makes the mirror a powerful metaphorical and exploratory tool in Kierkegaard’s phenomenology of moral perception.

Yet the choice of ‘the mirror’ as a metaphoric device is not, in some other respects, an entirely felicitous one. Anti-Climacus notes that “in the highest sense, this mirror [of possibility] does not tell the truth” (SUD, 37). In other words, by presenting us with the modal curiosity of an ‘us’ we are *not* yet, but which is nonetheless ‘us’ in the sense of shared identity, this metaphoric mirror goes beyond what a mirror is normally taken to do. Outside of fairy tales, mirrors show us what *is*, not what will be. Moreover, in *actually* looking into a mirror we (almost) never seem to have the experience of *not* recognising ourselves. Kierkegaard himself acknowledges this in his discussion of the “Mirror of the Word” in *For Self-Examination*:

*The first requirement is that you must not look at the mirror, observe the mirror, but must see yourself in the mirror. This seems so obvious that one might think it would scarcely need to be said. (FSE, 25)*

The idea of looking into a mirror without seeing or recognising ourselves is so contrary to normal experience as to be immediately suspect. Why, then, persist with the mirror analogy at all?

Part of the answer may be that, as Martin Andic has pointed out, mirror metaphors are used extensively in the tradition of *lectio divina* which Kierkegaard echoes in *For Self-Examination*, and religious writers such as Meister Eckhart are also drawn to the mirror as a metaphor for union with God.<sup>20</sup> Yet beyond these significant contextual reasons, Kierkegaard seems to have an important phenomenological reason for being drawn to this metaphor: the *immediate* self-recognition involved in seeing oneself in a mirror captures something crucial to the experience of self-recognition in moral thought. We saw a moment ago that the immediacy of self-recognition in considering possibilities serves to ground deliberation in the context of my present, concrete self, and prevents imagination from becoming detached from the moral context in which it takes place. In the context of moral self-examination, however, Kierkegaard places a slightly different (yet fundamentally connected) emphasis upon this immediacy. The experience of looking into a mirror is not just one of immediate self-recognition. Most of the time, it is also an immediately *evaluative* experience.

This evaluative aspect to the experience of looking in a mirror is essential to the power Kierkegaard finds in the mirror metaphor, as is also evident in *Works of Love*: “In honesty the lover presents himself before the beloved, and no mirror is as accurate as honesty in catching the slightest triviality, if it is genuine honesty or if in the lovers there is genuine faithfulness in reflecting themselves in the mirror of honesty that erotic love [*Elskov*] holds between them” (WL, 151). The evaluative aspect is crucial here: the mirror of honesty issues its reflections in the form of judgments. This is already prefigured in Kierkegaard’s choice of epigram for *Stages on Life’s Way*, the quote from G.C. Lichtenberg: “Such works are mirrors: when an ape looks in, no apostle can look out” (SLW, 8).<sup>21</sup> The reaction to such a work shows the reader himself in an evaluative light; the ape sees itself as an ape through reading it. In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the pseudonym “Johannes Climacus” uses the mirror metaphor to specify the specifically *ethical* character of the evaluation in question:

Let world history be a mirror, let the observer sit and look at himself in the mirror, but let us not forget the dog that also looked at itself in the mirror- and lost what it had. The ethical is also a mirror, and the person who looks at himself in it certainly loses something, and the more he looks at himself in it, the more he loses- that is, all the uncertain in order to gain the certain. (CUP, 1:153–154)

The reference to the Aesopian dog, who loses his bone when he catches sight of his reflection, shows us that the self-reflection inherent in the ethical

which Climacus expresses through this metaphor is one which does not leave the observer unchanged. Ethical contemplation shows the self to itself in a way that is both evaluative and effects actual change upon the self. Such reflection offers an evaluation that confronts the self and forces it to change the qualifications under which it lives (losing “all the uncertain in order to gain the certain” – that is, trading the approximation-knowledge of the objective for the certainty of resolution and decision). The metaphorical mirror, then, does not simply reflect the self but presents the self back to itself transfigured by the judgements appropriate to it (in this case, ethical). Evaluation is embedded in the reflection.

We are familiar with the embeddedness of evaluation in looking into a mirror (in a rather banal sense) from our everyday, non-moral use of mirrors. The experience of looking into a mirror and declaring “I look terrible” is familiar and unremarkable. But in this experience too we see that the act of self-recognition is in no sense prior to the evaluative act. If asked to describe our thought processes after having this experience, there would surely be something artificial and untrue in responding: “I saw an image in the mirror, I then recognised the image to be that of myself, and then concluded, by reference to some standard or other, that I look terrible.” Rather the looking, the recognition and the evaluation are experienced as a unitary moment. We do not examine a criterion and *then* look to see if we meet its requirements; rather, examination of the criterion and how we stand (in evaluative terms) towards it will be bound together in a single perceptual experience. I will, as it were, *see myself in the light of* the criterion – and the use of the word ‘see’ here retains the immediacy inherent in the mirror metaphor. To illustrate the immediacy of vision in the context of self-examination against a set of moral or religious imperatives, Kierkegaard gives us his most sustained and fruitful deployment of the mirror metaphor – the discussion of the “Mirror of the Word” in *For Self-Examination*.

### III. The mirror of the word: observing the mirror

The first chapter of *For Self-Examination*<sup>22</sup> is a discourse on the injunction in James’ Epistle to be a ‘doer’ and not merely a ‘hearer’ of the word of God:

If anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer of it, he is like a man who observes his bodily face in a mirror, for he would observe himself and go away and at once forget what he was like. (James 1:23)

Kierkegaard picks up upon this mirror simile and uses it as the basis of an extended discussion on the correct approach to Scripture, driven by the question “What Is Required In Order To Look at Oneself with True Blessing in the Mirror of the Word?” In this discourse, Scripture *itself* becomes the mirror:

God's word is the mirror – in reading it or hearing it, I am supposed to see myself in the mirror<sup>23</sup>

Equating the act of reading Scripture with looking into a mirror conflates both the self-representation (the image in the mirror) and the “criterion” we are to compare it to. Thus Scripture both simultaneously provides a moral standard *and* evaluates us against that standard. We are to look into the mirror and see ourselves as *judged* by the Word – that is, in reading the moral imperatives of Scripture we are to *experience* this reading as *showing* us how we stand. Again, the experience is thoroughly evaluative in a self-referential way, not as a postscript to reading scripture, but as an inextricable element of that reading. Kierkegaard goes on to lay out a schematic account of the conditions necessary for seeing oneself in the mirror of the Word. He divides this unusually clear and straightforward discourse<sup>24</sup> into three sections, each detailing another “requirement” of “seeing oneself in the mirror of the word”.

The first requirement for appropriate engagement with Scripture “is that you must not look at the mirror, observe the mirror, but see yourself in the mirror” (FSE, 25). As mentioned, Kierkegaard takes it that “this seems so obvious that one might think it would scarcely need to be said” (FSE, 25). Already, then, Kierkegaard has run up against a seeming infelicity in the mirror-metaphor. Yet he persists with it.<sup>25</sup> The injunction not to “observe the mirror” that Kierkegaard gives becomes, in the context of Scripture, a reiteration that the essential meaning of Scripture is that it is *to be acted upon*, and not made into fodder for endless interpretation.

Kierkegaard gives the arresting extended metaphor of a man who receives a letter from his beloved, written in a language foreign to him (FSE, 26–28). He takes a dictionary and toils away at attempting to interpret the letter. He angrily dismisses an acquaintance who remarks “Well, so you are reading a letter from your beloved” by making a distinction between translating and reading – to *read* a letter from the beloved is a very different activity to his present occupation (FSE, 27). The ‘Lover’ thus “distinguishes between reading and reading” (FSE, 27) or two different forms of reading, the first taken as preparatory to the second (for the sake of clarity I will hereafter refer to the translative mode of reading as “reading” and the second as “Reading”). In the second sense, “he understood [R]eading to mean that if the letter contained a wish, one should begin to comply at once; there was not a second to waste” (FSE, 28). The act of reading in preparation for Reading concerns the attempt to discern the literal meaning of Scripture, while Reading (taken as the ultimate purpose of biblical scholarship) concerns a more immediate, agent-directed engagement with the text. The distinction mirrors neatly the “Objective Truth” and “Subjective Truth” distinction in the *Postscript*; only in the second, subjectively qualified form

of engagement does the individual's personal relation to the truth under consideration become the decisive factor.

Rigorous Biblical exegesis is the attempt to determine precisely what Scripture says, and then, once this is determined, scriptural injunction can serve to tell us how we are to live, or how we stand. But of course, the task of biblical scholarship never does reach this state of perfect perspicuity whereby all moral demands are known and all moral questions settled. It therefore seems that scholarship is actually a strategy for *evading* responsibility (FSE, 32). The act of interpreting Scripture becomes a device for deferring the moment of having to "be alone with" the Word of God and so have to experience it as judging and claiming oneself. Kierkegaard uses "being alone" with the Word here to express a certain kind of comportment towards the Word where the Word is engaged as speaking *specifically* to the hearer. Scripture is here understood as irreducibly moral – that is, it immediately confers responsibility and obligation – and consequently, inescapably agent-directed: "To be alone with Holy Scripture! [...] it traps me at once; it asks me (indeed, it is as if it were God himself who asked me: Have you done what you read there?)" (FSE, 31)

On this suspiciously severe view, spending the finite time apportioned to us attempting to determine *exactly* what is required is a *moral* failure, as it seeks to excuse us from acting upon those requirements we *can* readily understand. Kierkegaard takes it that there is much in Scripture which is, as a point of empirical fact, easy to understand (but implies that were it to be subjected to interpretative scholarship, the clarity of what it demands would be lost).<sup>26</sup> In terms of non-Christian ethics, the translatability of Kierkegaard's thought is somewhat hampered here by his apparent blindness to the possibility of genuine moral dilemma.<sup>27</sup> In several places Kierkegaard appears to dismiss the possibility that there can be any real question over what is normatively required of us (though this may simply be a rhetorical strategy). *Christian Discourses* denounces as a sign of the corruption of the age that the content of duty has been "changed into a problem for thought [...] There ought not to be a question about duty, but there ought to be only the question about whether I am doing my duty" (CD, 205). If such an approach to normative ethics is problematic (or at least unhelpful) in Kierkegaard's ostensibly uniformly Christian, culturally homogenous context, it is even more so today. With respect to revealed morality, Julia Watkin has argued that Kierkegaard's position in *For Self-Examination* appears considerably weaker in a modern pluralist context, where many religions, and atheism, exist as live alternatives.<sup>28</sup> Yet the inability of reason to assist in our own moral or religious situation, which is characterised by increasingly divergent claims as to what considerations (if any) can have normative force, no more excuses us from morality than Kierkegaard takes it that uncertainties in biblical scholarship excuse

Christians from following Scripture. The murkiness of morality does not excuse us from being legitimately claimed by it.

#### IV. Mirrors and the immediacy of vision

The (moral) imperative to see oneself rather than the mirror – that is, attending to how one appears seen through the prism of God’s Word, rather than trying to discern the objective meaning of Scripture – therefore calls us to a particular engagement with Scripture, one where the Word speaks directly to me about *my* condition. This is reinforced by the second condition to be met:

*The second requirement is that in order to see yourself in the mirror when you read God’s Word you must (so that you actually do come to see yourself in the mirror) remember to say to yourself incessantly: It is I to whom it is speaking; it is I about whom it is speaking. (FSE, 35)*

This is simply a restatement of the need for a personal, direct relationship to the Word rather than an objective, disinterested one (FSE, 36). Kierkegaard urges us to bear in mind when reading that the subject of Scripture is ourselves and our own moral condition. The simplest reading here is that one simply keeps reminding oneself periodically, as if pausing every so often to suffix passages of Scripture with “thou art the man” (FSE, 38). Indeed, in alluding to the Persian king, Darius, who had a servant remind him each day to remember to take vengeance upon the Athenians (FSE, 37), Kierkegaard provides fuel for such a straightforward reading.

Yet as we have seen, the mirror metaphor entails a form of immediacy in vision, and such immediacy is plainly at odds with the reading sketched above. Yet throughout this discourse, Kierkegaard does speak as if reading Scripture should be punctuated by discrete moments of self-relation which are temporally separable from comprehension of the text itself. Kierkegaard’s description of a correct reading of Scripture is characterised by phrases such as “Here you shall say...” and “Then you shall say...” Is there, then, any evidence of this claimed immediate self-relation built into vision?

To begin with, there is evidence both within the text and elsewhere in Kierkegaard that the need to remind oneself indicates a failure of moral vision. In the *Postscript*, Climacus claims explicitly that the “subjective thinker”, a self whose orientation is such as to allow for genuine moral engagement with the world rather than selfless, disinterested contemplation, does not have need of such reminders. His self-presence in his thought is such that his thought becomes *action* itself rather than a prelude *to* action:

...he, acting, works through himself in his thinking about his own existence, consequently that he actually thinks what is thought by

actualizing it, consequently that he does not think for a moment: Now, you must keep watch every moment – but that he keeps watch every moment. (CUP, 1:169)

Just as in ethical imagination there is no moment of ‘stepping back’ in which we declare our relation to that which we contemplate, here thought does not declare “this is what I must do”, but orients itself such that it is already doing it. Instead of the precursor to action, thought becomes action itself, for Climacus considers decision itself to be a form of action, even if not action in the “external” sense (CUP, 1:339–340).<sup>29</sup>

Returning to the Mirror of the Word discussion in *For Self-Examination*, we find the same thought: that the need for reminders points to a failure of moral cognition. In hearing the story told by the prophet Nathan, King David fails to see that the story is about himself. Unlike Scripture, this story contains no overt moral prescriptions, so the listener is not told *what* is normatively right. However, as with Kierkegaard’s upbuilding discourses themselves, Nathan’s parable assumes the listener shares its moral suppositions. David’s immediate condemnation of the figure in the story and his actions shows he does indeed have the same conception of what is morally blameworthy in the situation as Nathan, but in itself this is not enough; he also requires the interpretative postscript “thou art the man” to make “the transition to the subjective” (FSE, 38). This statement is needed to take David from his objective approach from the story, an objectivity which he uses to keep awareness of his own moral culpability at arm’s length. Had David been more concerned for his own moral condition, the implication seems to be, he would have seen himself in the story *without* needing to be told that it was a story about himself (even though the story itself concerned the slaughtering of sheep).<sup>30</sup> In the same way, Kierkegaard re-tells the Good Samaritan parable and claims we are to understand that the Priest who passes the injured man by *is us* (FSE, 40–41).

Importantly, the Nathan example seems to push the notion of *self*-recognition to breaking point here. Kierkegaardian self-recognition is essentially a matter of seeing our involvement in what we contemplate, rather than noting a merely visual similarity with ourselves. Just as we recognize ourselves in dreams even though we often do not *look like* ourselves, because the figure is *supposed to be us*,<sup>31</sup> so here Nathan shows David himself in a story about sheep. David is to *see himself in* the story even though there is nothing in the objective conceptual content of the story that resembles or alludes to him. Once again, the *meaning* conferred by the image is nowhere to be found in its direct content, but in the viewer’s engagement therewith. This is not, however, to say that David simply imports a meaning into the story that properly does not belong there; rather, he uncovers a meaning that is only accessible if he engages with the story in an immediately self-referential attitude.

The same is true of another Anti-Climacan mirror-metaphor, that of contradiction-as-mirror developed in *Practice in Christianity*. Here, contemplation of the “contradiction” of the utterly paradoxical figure of the God-Man discloses the self to itself:

And only the sign of contradiction can do this: it draws attention to itself and then it presents a contradiction. There is a something that makes it impossible not to look- and look, as one is looking one sees as in a mirror, one comes to see oneself, or he who is the sign of the contradiction looks straight into one’s heart while one is staring into the contradiction. (PC, 126–127)

This “mirror” is explicitly another human being at least; the God-Man is a concrete human being, “not a fantastic unity that has never existed except *sub specie aeterni*” who “discloses the thoughts of hearts” (PC, 126). Yet in another sense, insofar as the God-Man is God, and an irremediable contradiction, He is radically other to the contemplator. Yet this contemplation discloses the self to itself, transfigured as though viewed through the God-Man’s evaluative gaze which “looks straight into one’s heart” (PC, 127). Thus one “comes to see oneself” (PC, 126) but in such a way that the disclosure is not merely reflective but is itself performative:

A contradiction placed squarely in front of a person – if one can get him to look at it – is a mirror; as he is forming a judgement, what dwells within him must be disclosed. It is a riddle, but as he is guessing the riddle, what dwells within him is disclosed by the way he guesses. The contradiction confronts him with a choice, and as he is choosing, together with what he chooses, he himself is disclosed. (PC, 127)

Again, the evaluative meaning of the experience of staring into this “mirror” is not prefigured in the content of the “image” one sees in the mirror. Narratives about the exploits of Jesus of Nazareth, or claims for his divinity, do not *prima facie* include the contemplator in them, yet the contemplator is revealed to herself in the contemplation through her subjective engagement with it. And this engagement takes the form of action, namely, a choice (PC, 127), rather than in the making of objective judgements regarding the content of the ‘image’.

If we are to see our own moral condition in stories and injunctions which do not contain *us* in their conceptual content, this self-evaluative, self-referential aspect must supervene upon the conceptual content of these stories. Kierkegaard elsewhere makes similar points with respect to, for instance, the “earnest thought of death”. The moral value of the thought of death is lost if mortality does not become part of the content of *all* my



thought: "To think this uncertainty [of death] once and for all, or once a year at matins on New Year's morning, is nonsense, of course, and is not to think it at all" (CUP, 1:166). Climacus here enjoins us "to think it [death] into every moment of my life", or "to think it every moment". As Westphal observes, this obviously makes little sense if it is read as an injunction that one must constantly be thinking of the fact of their impending death, even if they also happen to be thinking about other things at the same time: "Under this impossible, morbid, and no doubt immoral scenario, whenever offered a penny for my thoughts, I could answer, 'I am thinking about my death and immortality.'"<sup>32</sup>

Westphal argues that what Climacus is urging here is that death not be treated as a topic for objective reflection at all. Instead, 'thinking death into every moment' would be more akin to Sartrean non-thetic consciousness. Just as, for Sartre, a pre-reflective consciousness of consciousness is built into every moment of intentional consciousness, as a non-reflective awareness, so for Climacus, the thought of death attends every thought without every thought thereby being about death.<sup>33</sup> Awareness of death will be built into intentionality itself without every thought thereby intending death *per se*. Note, too, that if Westphal is right, this will be necessary for an investigation into death to be legitimate in Climacian terms, in that it is this pre-reflective awareness of mortality which preserves a link between the 'object' (the thought of death) and the 'subject' (whose death it is).<sup>34</sup> We are therefore talking about a form of concentration in which the thought of death is present in every act of intentional consciousness but not in such a way that each thought is the thought of death.

Death is not the content of the thoughts, actions and intentions which the subject forms in the course of their daily round, yet the thought of it is *present* in all these other thoughts and actions. This is reasonably easy to envisage if we imagine the thought of death as a certain mood or attitude inherent in everything we think or do – think of a person whose every action seems to proceed from or be somehow coloured by, say, anger, or fear, or boredom. But the thought of death – the thought of *my* death – is more conceptually fully-fleshed than this. Climacus' idea seems to be that this specific, fairly concrete thought – that it is certain that I will die and that I cannot know when this will occur – must somehow be built into my deliberation over which tie to put on, who to marry, and where to holiday next year. Clearly, unless we are obsessively morbid to the point of being dysfunctional, such a thought could only be present in such decisions in a non-thetic way. In the same way, in *For Self-Examination* Kierkegaard claims that the correct engagement with Scripture will involve seeing my own moral involvement in the text even though the actual content of Scripture does not contain me personally. Meister Eckhart seems to accord a similar status to the thought of God in theist consciousness:

Whoever possesses God in their being [...] for them, all things taste of God and in all things it is God's image that they see. [...] It is the same as when someone has a great thirst and, although they may be doing something other than drinking and their minds may be turned to other things, the thought of a drink will not leave them for as long as they thirst, whatever they do, whoever they are with, whatever they strive for, whatever their works or thoughts; and the greater their thirst, the greater, the more intense, immediate and persistent the thought of a drink becomes.<sup>35</sup>

Note that Eckhart here presents thirst not merely as a state of feeling (which the physiological aspect of it clearly is), which we could easily envisage as *accompanying* any thought or action. I can imagine Eckhart writing the above-quoted passage in a state of pain, hunger, exhaustion, elation or anxiety, without its actual content being perceptibly different. There is nothing in the thoughts which he assembles here which must necessarily have been accompanied at the time of writing by a specific emotional or physiological state. But Eckhart claims something stronger: the "thought of a drink" will accompany every thought, action and utterance of the thirsty person. Thirst here is not merely a feeling (or mood for that matter), it is the desire for something specific, something which is composed of *conceptual* content. Nor is it simply that a thirsty person 'wants' a drink in the sense that a drink just happens to answer to a desire to alleviate the feeling of thirst – essentially the same sense in which a dying plant 'wants' water. The person desires this specific thing to slake their thirst, even when they are thinking and talking of other things. Eckhart goes on to claim that when a person is in love, "the object of their love will never be extinguished in them, but they will find its image in all things, and the greater their love becomes, the more present to them it will be".<sup>36</sup> There is a parallel with the youth described in *Practice in Christianity*: obsessed with the image of a moral exemplar, his "eyes see nothing of what lies closest around him" until the "world of actuality in which he is standing and the relation of his surrounding world to himself" reasserts itself (PC, 189). Seeing the image everywhere and at the same time seeing the concrete reality in which he finds himself causes the image to overlay the world as a moral imperative.

Eckhart sees attaining this condition as necessary if the individual's every action is to be "made radiant" by the ever-present thought of God. For Eckhart, this process seems to be one of habituation, like learning an instrument: after sufficient practice, concentration is no longer required.<sup>37</sup> Kierkegaard certainly does *not* want to claim that practice at reading the bible will make attaining the appropriate interpenetration of subjectivity (which will prevent us from ever being distracted by 'the mirror itself') easy, or that habitual rumination on death will integrate death non-thetically into our other thought. For Kierkegaard, only "earnestness" (*Alvor*) confers

“originality” on disposition and marks the difference between dispositions of character and thoughtless habit. Such earnestness cannot be acquired by habituation. Nonetheless, he does seem to imply that when moral vision is operating *correctly*, these things – our finitude, our moral implicatedness in what we contemplate – are contained immediately in thought. The need for reminders such as David’s “thou art the man” or Darius’ “remember the Athenians” indicates a *failure of vision*.<sup>38</sup> Just as the drunken peasant in the parable in *Sickness Unto Death* should not have needed someone to remind him that the legs facing destruction were his own, so too we would not need such reminders if our vision were correctly oriented towards our moral emplacement. But the moral capacities of humans are highly prone to failure, and indeed failure, according to Kierkegaard, is their usual condition. This characteristic failure of vision can actually work *for* the person who, like Nathan, seeks to communicate some moral claim via an ostensibly unrelated discourse, as Kierkegaard claims in *Christian Discourses*:

One tells him a story. This now puts him completely at ease, because he understands well enough that since it is a story the discourse is not about him. A few words are introduced into this story that perhaps do not immediately have their effect but sometime later are suddenly transformed into a question of conscience. (CD, 235)

The moral communicator can thus use the indirectness of the parable form to get under their listener’s guard; the effect is more insidious than a direct, didacticising address which the listener might reflexively or defensively reject. This awareness of the characteristic fallibility of moral vision also forms the basis of Kierkegaard’s third condition which must be met to look into the Mirror of the Word: not immediately forgetting what one has seen. Kierkegaard takes it that we almost certainly will forget, but that sufficiently humble effort (i.e. trying to remember for an hour rather than grandiosely assuming we can remember forever) increases our chance of partial success (FSE, 44–46).

## V. Teleological moral psychology

The considerations discussed here gesture towards a very specific model of Kierkegaardian moral psychology. On such a model, vision is inherently teleologically qualified in that the modes of perception we are to cultivate implicitly tend towards a final, perfected state in which our vision is immediately self-referential. When our moral vision is operating *correctly*, our implicatedness in what we contemplate is contained immediately in thought without need of subsequent thematisation. Moreover, as intimated in the account of Reading and the Climacan understanding of action, such

perfected vision issues immediately and uncomplicatedly in volition and action. Achieving such a *telos* is ultimately impossible for temporally-located beings whose repentance is itself a moment of deficit of action and therefore a new guilt (CA, 117–18). More contingently, our moral capacities are deeply fallible. Yet the theoretical and practical impossibility of attaining the *telos* does not, in Kierkegaard's thought, dilute its teleological status.

This specific moral psychology, because of its emphasis on vision and self-recognition, will also contain within it the same tensions between volitional and non-volitional elements as vision itself. By centralising vision in moral agency Kierkegaard makes how we see things itself a morally judgeable matter. Intuitively, this implies there is at least an oblique relation between vision and volition if vision is to count as subject to normative judgements. The volitional elements of vision are indeed discussed openly in Kierkegaard's use of mirror metaphors, and the emphasis upon the volitional is not surprising given that Kierkegaard seeks to emphasise the active, subjective, personally invested element of this engagement with Scripture, the *looking at oneself* necessary if one is to *see oneself*: "it takes a personality, an *I*, to look at oneself in a mirror; a wall can be seen in a mirror, but a wall cannot see itself or look at itself in a mirror" (FSE, 43–44).

The reflective function of a mirror therefore requires a volitive act- the act of looking at oneself. This seems self-evident. But in a sketch for *For Self-Examination*, Kierkegaard elaborates on this by outlining (in somewhat skeletal detail) further requirements "to Look at Oneself with True Blessing in the Mirror of the Word", the first of which is that "One must to a certain extent know oneself beforehand. He who does not know himself cannot recognise himself, either" and this self-knowledge must ultimately equate to God-knowledge or standing before God (FSE, 234). Kierkegaard further claims here that when we 'accidentally' see ourselves in a mirror, without expecting to, we do not recognize ourselves. This seems to be plainly wrong, although we can certainly imagine circumstances in which it might happen. The point of this empirical claim seems to be to emphasise that self-recognition involves a certain degree of openness to the experience. Self-recognition requires an attitude of receptivity, and adopting such an attitude will be a willed act. This is the thrust of Kierkegaard's second condition presented in the sketch: having the courage to see oneself (FSE, 234).

By positing these volitional aspects of vision, while at the same time arguing that we must be prepared to accept what the mirror shows us (i.e. having *what* we see determined by something external) Kierkegaard opens up a tension within vision itself. The act of *seeing* contains within itself an uneasy and irreducible interplay between voluntary and involuntary elements. Ferreira has used the example of a Gestalt shift to illustrate this tension between volitional and non-volitional elements in vision. In the

familiar example of seeing Jastrow's figure as a duck *or* a rabbit there is an ambiguous relation between active and passive elements of the experience:

In a situation where a *Gestalt* shift occurs, we initially see only one possibility; at some point, after concentrated attention or perhaps coaching, a different figure comes into focus for us. Seeing the latter figure is not the direct or immediate result of any decision or volition, nor is it a choice in any standard sense [...] We can decide to *look for* the figure we are told is there and cannot yet see, but we cannot decide to see (recognise) it. Recognising the new and qualitatively different figure is not the direct result of willing or the necessary result of the effort to look for it.<sup>39</sup>

We can, therefore, make a deliberate effort to try to see something in a specific way- in the context of Kierkegaard's use of mirror-metaphors, to see *ourselves* in the full existential import of that term. But the actual vision itself has the quality of being imposed upon us rather than chosen. The relation between the volitional and the non-volitional in vision therefore remains essentially opaque. James Giles has contended that Ferreira's argument does not succeed; that Gestalt shifts and indeed Kierkegaardian leaps in general do, in fact, resolve straightforwardly into clear choices.<sup>40</sup> Giles' analysis highlights the need to clarify the exact moment of ambiguity in a Gestalt shift. What is at issue is neither the moment of involuntary seeing nor subsequent voluntary shifting from seeing one thing to the other, but rather the specific moment of looking for we have been told is there but cannot yet discern. This is plainly something we can try to do, yet no specific action corresponds to that trying (except perhaps a sort of disengagement from the image we can see – trying not to see the rabbit in the hope that the duck will appear to us). Moreover, in that the leap is construed by Kierkegaard as something that occurs in all non-tautological thought, the category of the leap does, as Ferreira contends and Giles implicitly denies, pervade cognitions that do not answer to the name of "choice" or "decision" at all. Ferreira's demonstration that there is an implicit and unresolved tension in the Kierkegaardian category of the leap is thus both correct and instructive.

Moreover, for Kierkegaard as for Murdoch, how we see things is essentially dispositional. The perfected moral agent according to the teleology outlined above is one whose ways of seeing and responding to the world are so settled as to be completely predictable, which poses obvious challenges to its status as an *agent* rather than a mere locus of causation. Not only will the perfected agent's every action seem to be predetermined, the unity of vision and action makes the agent's actions so spontaneous and

unreflective as to seem to empty the agent of anything deserving the name of volition.

In everyday moral life we *do* take it that people are responsible for how they see things even though there is no conscious decision to see things as they do. This is why David and the drunken peasant both seem responsible for their failures of vision even though there has been no (overt) decision to see things in an inadequate way. More than this, though, the model of moral psychology we have sketched here suggests that it is the non-thetic self-referentiality that attends certain ways of apprehending the world (elsewhere picked out by Kierkegaard's use of the term *interesse*, "interest") that suffuses these spontaneous actions with subjectivity such that the subject is still fully present in them. Here we glimpse an important sense in which Kierkegaard has much to offer to contemporary attempts to describe a psychology that accounts for both the volitional freedom and the stable dispositional states that our moral intuitions would seem to demand. Commentators such as John J. Davenport have seen in Kierkegaard a bridge between the libertarian conception of will characteristic of existentialism and the stable dispositional states central to virtue ethics.<sup>41</sup> As Davenport notes, "earnestness" is presented in *The Concept of Anxiety* as suffusing our actions with "acquired originality" such that repetition does not devolve into mere mindless habit.<sup>42</sup> Here too, *interesse* seems to provide a sense in which the subject's thought is 'shot through' with a self-referentiality embedded in cognition that allows the subject to *be in* cognitions and actions that seem utterly unreflective and spontaneous. In Kierkegaard's distinctive account of moral vision, then, we find resources that, properly unpacked and deployed in new and unexpected contexts, may yet make significant contributions to our understanding of moral psychology.<sup>43</sup>

## Notes

1. Ferreira's work will be referred to throughout, but especial mention should be made of her *Transforming Vision*, the point of departure for discussions of the uniquely ambiguous character of Kierkegaardian qualitative transitions and their similarity to Gestalt shifts. Ferreira, M. (1991) *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
2. The key moments in the debate over Kierkegaard's purported irrationalism are collected in Davenport, J. and A. Rudd (Eds.) (2001) *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court)
3. Ferreira, M. (1998) "Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap" in A. Hannay and G. Marino (Eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 210
4. See, for example, Roberts, R.C. (1998) "Existence, Emotion, and Virtue: Classical Themes in Kierkegaard" in Hannay and Marino (Eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* especially pp. 195–197
5. Furtak, R.A. (2005) *Wisdom in Love: Kierkegaard and the Ancient Quest for Emotional Integrity* (Notre Dame, IA: University of Notre Dame Press). "Perceptions of significance" and the perceptual aspects of emotion play an important role in Furtak's excellent discussion of Kierkegaard in relation to classical stoic themes.

6. For an extended discussion of this aspect of Kierkegaard's authorship, including the crucial interrelationship of analogy and disanalogy in religious writing, see Lorentzen, J. (2001) *Kierkegaard's Metaphors* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press).
7. The *Kierkegaard's Writings* series will be referred to according to the *International Kierkegaard Commentary* system of abbreviations and format (Title, Volume: Page Number) and appear in this paper in the following order:
  - SUD Kierkegaard, S. [1849] (1980) *The Sickness Unto Death* (Trans.) Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press)
  - FSE Kierkegaard, S. [1851] (1990) *For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourself!* (Trans.) H.V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press)
  - WL Kierkegaard, S. [1847] (1995) *Works of Love* (Trans.) Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press)
  - SLW Kierkegaard, S. [1845] (1988) *Stages on Life's Way* (Trans.) H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press)
  - CUP, 1 Kierkegaard, S. [1846] (1992) *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments' Vol I* (Trans.) H.V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press)
  - CD Kierkegaard, S. [1848] (1997) *Christian Discourses and The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (Trans.) H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press)
  - CA Kierkegaard, S. [1844] (1980) *The Concept of Anxiety* (Trans.) R. Thomte and A.B. Anderson (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press)
  - PC Kierkegaard, S. [1850] (1991) *Practice in Christianity* (Trans.) H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press)
8. Ferreira, M. (1989) "Repetition, concreteness, and imagination" *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* Vol. 25 p. 28
9. Murdoch, I. [1970] (2001) *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge) p. 57; also her dialogue with Bryan Magee in Magee, B. (2001) (Ed.) *Talking Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 236. See also Lita, A. (2003) "'Seeing' human goodness: Iris Murdoch on moral virtue" *Minerva- An Internet Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 7 pp. 149–150.
10. Grøn, A. (1998) "The Dialectic of Recognition in *Works of Love*" in N.J. Cappelørn & H. Deuser (Eds.) *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1998* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter)
11. Westphal, M. (1987) "Kierkegaard's Psychology and Unconscious Despair" in R.L. Perkins (Ed.) *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Sickness Unto Death* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press) p. 40
12. There is a useful parallel here with Frankfurt's conception of 'reasonableness' versus being 'crazy'. Frankfurt holds that Hume's account of a preference as being irrational only insofar as it is based on a false judgement of fact or causal connection ("Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my little finger") is too narrow. It is, Frankfurt avers, "lunatic" to prefer the destruction of the world to minor discomfort in my little finger, "whatever Hume says". Hence the Humean conception of rationality in relation to preferences is too narrow to encompass our actual judgements about which preferences are reasonable and which are not. Though the peasant's decision not to move is clearly based upon factual error, and is thus irrational even in Hume's limited sense, this doesn't seem to be what strikes us as flawed in the peasant's reaction. Consider a radical skeptic in the drunken peasant's place, arguing that there is no compelling reason to suppose that the legs he thinks he sees are his, or indeed that he has legs at all. If, on this basis, he failed to move, would he escape the censure which Kierkegaard's account leads us to bring down upon the peasant? Would we not say, with Frankfurt, "he *must be crazy*"? See Frankfurt, H. G.

- (1988) *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp. 184–86
13. Wittgenstein, L. (1953) *Philosophical Investigations* (Revised German-English edition) (Trans.) G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers) p. 157e.
  14. Even in the example of “inductive” recognition, the moment of decision (if it ever comes) will itself constitute a “leap” – a radical shift between the quantitative process of inductive reasoning and the qualitative conclusion of identity. For Kierkegaard, there is a “leap of inference in induction and analogy [...] the conclusion can only be reached by a LEAP”. Kierkegaard, S. (1967–78) *Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* Vol. III (Trans.) H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Bloomington, Indiana and London: Indiana University Press) p. 19
  15. To draw an attractive if admittedly tenuous natural language point, if we said “The Peasant was run over by a carriage”, no-one would correct us by saying “No, the Peasant was not run over, his legs were”. Such a description leaves out the peasant’s inextricable involvement in the situation, something that is crucial to any adequate description of what takes place.
  16. Note that this is not the same point as that which Derek Parfit makes about our reduced psychological connectedness with our far-future selves; we can fail to ‘recognise’ ourselves (in Anti-Climacus’ sense) even in representations of our closely psychologically connected selves. Insofar as Anti-Climacus’ recognition does not depend on the ‘closeness’ of imaginative representations to the circumstances of the imagining self, it would appear to be temporally neutral in a way that the Parfitian relation of psychological connectedness is not. The implications of the Anti-Climacus model for debates about the endurance of selves through time will need to be set aside for another time. See Parfit, D. (1984) *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) especially pp. 307–326.
  17. Hume, D. [1739–40] (1969) *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Ed.) E.C. Mossner (London: Penguin) p. 146
  18. Sartre, J.P. *Being and Nothingness* (Trans.) H. E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1958) p. xxix
  19. I am grateful to a comment made by Eiko Hanaoka for helping me to re-frame this thought in terms of the object/subject schema.
  20. Andic, M. (2002) “The Mirror” in R.L. Perkins (Ed.) *International Kierkegaard Commentary: For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press)
  21. Johannes Climacus claims this epigram is directed to readers who will dismiss *Stages on Life's Way* as simply the same as *Either/Or*. See CUP, 1:285–86.
  22. *Til Selvprovelse*. As *Prove* is roughly “test”, it could be argued that the usage of ‘self-examination’ here already carries in-built evaluative overtones.
  23. FSE, 25
  24. The Hongs note in their Historical Introduction that the unusually accessible style of *For Self-Examination* seems to stem from an uncharacteristic desire on Kierkegaard’s part to reach as many readers as possible. See FSE xii–xiii.
  25. Kierkegaard claims at this point that he is simply reiterating James here – yet Kierkegaard’s mirror-metaphor and James’ do not seem to intersect until Kierkegaard has reached his third “Requirement”. In that sense then, even if Kierkegaard takes it that (in the context of a discourse dedicated to Christian doctrine) he is already committed to following the mirror-metaphor through regardless of its apparent awkwardness, in fact he is not. The discourse takes the mirror metaphor far beyond anything that can be found in James.
  26. FSE, 34
  27. For a discussion of Kierkegaard’s apparent lack of awareness of the possibility of genuine moral uncertainty, see Marino, G. (2001) *Kierkegaard in the Present Age* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press) pp. 43–60



28. Watkin, J. (2002) "The Letter from the Lover: Kierkegaard on the Bible and Belief" in R.L. Perkins (Ed.) *International Kierkegaard Commentary: For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself?* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press) pp. 311–313
29. In this passage, Climacus re-tells the Good Samaritan parable and imagines a twist—suppose the Levite priest, after failing to help the wounded man, experiences a twinge of remorse and heads back to help him, only to find the Samaritan has beaten him to it and the wounded man no longer has need of his assistance. Climacus asks if the Levite could then have been said to have acted, and affirms that he has acted, but not in "the external world" (CUP, 1:340). C. Stephen Evans argues that this shows Kierkegaard to share the "standard intuition that underlies libertarianism: persons are only truly responsible for that which is within their power. To the extent that results are not within our power, to that extent we are not responsible". However, Kierkegaard seems to have a much wider conception of what we are responsible for, what we are *guilty* of, than would fit this libertarian conception. It is not, for instance, within our power to alter the temporally-arranged structure of consciousness, yet temporality, according to at least two Kierkegaardian pseudonyms, compounds our guilt (e.g. CUP, 1:526: "since meanwhile time has been passing, a bad beginning has been made...from that moment the total guilt, which is decisive, practices usury with new guilt"; also CA, 117–18: "repentance must become an object to itself, inasmuch as the moment of repentance becomes a deficit of action") Evans, C. S. (1991) "Where There's a Will There's a Way: Kierkegaard's Theory of Action" in H.J. Silverman (Ed.) *Writing the Politics of Difference* (NY: State University of New York Press) p. 81
30. Interestingly, Kierkegaard had earlier mentioned Nathan briefly in *Works of Love* in a passage stressing that Scripture speaks directly and exclusively to the reader. When read *properly*, "The Gospel does not need to add what the prophet Nathan added to his parable, 'You are the man', since it is already contained in the form of the statement and in its being a word of the Gospel" (WL, 14). Here, the correct interpretation of the phrase "The tree is to be known by its fruits" is that "you [the reader of Gospel] are the tree", not "You or we are to know the tree by its fruits" (WL, 14). The precise language forecloses the possibility of reading this as a statement about how *we* are to know the tree (love) when we see it, but only when we understand we are to identify with the tree does this intention become manifest. Thus how we approach the content of scripture will be decisive for the meaning we ascribe to the language, in a way that is both dependent upon the language and yet not determinable by it.
31. Williams, B. (1973) *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp. 26–45
32. Westphal, M. (1996) *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press) pp. 109–10
33. Westphal, M. *Becoming a Self* p. 110
34. For an extended discussion of what is necessary in order to think *about* one's death legitimately in Climacian terms, see Stokes, P. (2006) "The Power of Death: Retroactivity, Narrative, and Interest" in R.L. Perkins (Ed.) *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Prefaces/ Writing Sampler and Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press).
35. Meister Eckhart (1994) *Selected Writings* (Trans.) O. Davies (London: Penguin) p. 11
36. Eckhart *Selected Writings* p. 11
37. Eckhart *Selected Writings* p. 12. It should be noted that, as Oliver Davies notes in his introduction (p. xxxiv), Eckhart often speaks from an idealized position, presenting how things *would* be the case if the self had attained the oneness with God that is at present beyond them. Kierkegaard, too, seems to be gesturing towards a model of perfected moral agency – where vision coincides with decision – that for weak and imperfect beings such as he takes us to be may be finally unattainable.

38. Kierkegaard suggests that it is surprising Darius needed someone to remind him to take his revenge: "That was indeed something to remember; it seems to me it would have been better to have a slave who reminded him every day to forget." FSE, 37
39. Ferreira, "Faith and the Kierkegaardian leap" p. 217
40. Giles, J. (2000) "Kierkegaard's Leap: Anxiety and Freedom" in J. Giles (Ed.) *Kierkegaard and Freedom* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave) pp. 73–74
41. Davenport, J. (2001) "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre" in J. Davenport and A. Rudd (Eds.) *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre* pp. 265–323
42. Davenport "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics" pp. 276–282
43. I am grateful to participants at the "Kierkegaard and Asia" conference, held at the University of Melbourne in December 2005, for valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.