*Chapter Five*

Kierkegaard on Hope as Essential to Selfhood

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Kierkegaard differs from his contemporaries Schopenhauer and Nietzsche by emphasizing the value of hope and its importance for human agency and selfhood or practical identity. In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard argues that despair involves a loss of hope and courage that is extremely common. Moreover, despair involves being double-minded by having an incoherent practical identity (although it need not be recognized as such if the agent mistakes his identity). A coherent practical identity, by contrast, requires wholehearted commitment toward ideals *and* the hope that our ideals are realizable.[1]

Although Kierkegaard's analysis of despair in *The Sickness unto Death* is well known, his equally important analysis of hope is largely neglected.[2] There seems to be two reasons for this neglect. First, Kierkegaard's account of hope is spread out over a number of lesser-known writings such as *For Self-Examination*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, *Christian Discourses*, and *Eighteen Upbuilding Writings* in addition to the better-known *Works of Love*. Whereas *The Sickness unto Death* analyses despair systematically, these lesser-known writings give a somewhat fragmented account of hope that is largely overlooked by commentators.[3] (Partially as a result, Kierkegaard is known as the melancholic Dane.)

Second, Kierkegaard's *via negativa* methodology approaches hope (as well as selfhood and practical identity) indirectly by focusing on despair.[4] However, despair itself is described as hopelessness both by *The Sickness unto Death* and various commentators (SKS 11, 133f., 153 / SUD, 18, 37f.) (Grøn 1997, 151; Hannay 2006, 142). Kierkegaard even argues that hope
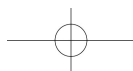
proper, that is hope against hope, presupposes despair while overcoming it at every instant (see section 5).

On Kierkegaard's account, hope and despair are therefore so closely connected that it is difficult to separate them without ignoring his dialectical and negativistic approach to selfhood. In the following, we will start by introducing Kierkegaard's influential account of despair and then show how it not only points toward moral commitment but also toward hope and religiousness. Instead of giving a full account of despair, the present text limits itself to elements of despair that are directly relevant for Kierkegaard's account of hope.

1. DESPAIR AS LOSS OF HOPE AND COURAGE

Kierkegaard characterizes despair both as hopelessness and as double-mindedness. Here we will start by discussing the former, while the next section will discuss double-mindedness.

It is often the case that despair is contrasted with hope, since despair seems to entail hopelessness. In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard follows this common usage of the terms by characterizing despair as hopelessness (SKS 11, 133f., 153 / SUD, 18, 37f.) (Bernier 2015, 58ff.; Gouwens 1996, 155ff.; Theunissen 2005). More specifically, he takes despair to involve an act whereby the agent actively gives up hope and courage (Grøn 1997, 152f.).

On the one hand, despair involves *passivity* by virtue of resulting from an experience of loss or disappointment. By suffering (what he takes to be) a fatal loss or disappointment, the agent gives up all hope and courage. As a result, he is stuck in a desperate situation and can neither cope with the loss nor accept himself (SKS 11, 176ff. / SUD, 60ff.). The demonic, for example, is deeply disappointed over the impossibility of self-creation and defiantly rejects all help to overcome despair (SKS 11, 182–87 / SUD, 67–74).

On the other hand, despair involves *activity* since the agent takes the loss (or disappointment) to be significant enough to give up hope and courage. Kierkegaard is particularly interested in radical despair that gives up all significant hope and courage by attributing infinite value or importance to the loss or disappointment (Grøn 1997, 143–53). Despair is then not merely something one suffers passively, since it always involves actively abandoning hope and courage. It is not only a psychological phenomenon but also a moral notion that refers to an unwillingness to accept human agency in general and moral responsibility in particular (Kosch 2006, 142f., 154, 206–8).

On this account, despair presupposes that the agent has ideals, values, or at least something he identifies with, which he takes to be actually impossible

to realize. For instance, the agent values his personal freedom and identifies fully with it but takes it to be impossible to realize because it is conditioned by states of affairs that do not obtain (e.g., due to imprisonment). Hope, by contrast, sees the good as possible to realize. Kierkegaard describes hope as expectancy of the possibility of good (SKS 9, 249 / WL, 249), as an anticipation that what one hopes for can be realized. The object of hope then represents the ideals or values of the agent.

Both despair and hope seem to involve a fundamental tension, or conflict, between ideals and reality. Both presuppose that the world is not as it should have been. Still, despair and hope represent fundamentally different attitudes toward the conflict between ideals and reality. Hope takes this conflict to be resolvable, whereas despair takes it to be irresolvable. Despair therefore overlaps with forms of nihilism and pessimism, which hold that the world as it is ought not to be, whereas the world that ought to be does not exist.[5]

Pessimism was developed by Schopenhauer, who Kierkegaard read in 1854–1855. Although Kierkegaard shares Schopenhauer's view that the world is unacceptable in its actuality, he nevertheless affirms a hopeful perspective by viewing the world as acceptable in its potentiality. Merely accepting the world as it is—as Nietzsche suggests—would amount to a fatalistic acceptance of evil and injustice in the world. Hope, by contrast, involves a protest that makes it possible to try to overcome evil and injustice by enabling progress toward ideals in the future. Nietzsche, by contrast, argues that we must either accept the world unconditionally (by saying yes to the eternal recurrence of the same) or be pessimists or nihilists who condemn it as being incompatible with our ideals or values. To Kierkegaard, this represents a false dilemma, since hope represents a third option that offers the possibility of reconciling ideals and reality.

2. DESPAIR AS DOUBLE-MINDEDNESS: INCOHERENT PRACTICAL IDENTITY

The above account of despair, points to a further idea—emphasized by Kierkegaard—that despair takes the form of double-mindedness. Just like the German *Verzweiflung*, the Danish word for despair—*Fortvivelse*—is based on the numeral "two" (Danish *tvi* or *tve*; German *zwei*), suggesting that despair involves a split or duality. Based on this, Kierkegaard writes, "[E]veryone in despair has two wills, one that he futilely wants to follow entirely, and one that he futilely wants to get rid of entirely" (SKS 8, 144 / UD, 30). Despair involves being double-minded by having an incoherent will. However, rather than merely referring to volition, it involves an incoherent practical identity with different motives (Davenport 2008, ch. 3; Rudd 2012, 42ff.). To despair is simply to lack a coherent practical identity.

On Kierkegaard's account, despair results from a tension that is fundamental to human agency and selfhood. More specifically, our agency and selfhood are characterized by both facticity and freedom. Facticity represents a given, inescapable sociohistorical context as well as embodiment that limits or constrains human agency. Freedom, by contrast, represents the human ability to transcend limitations by gradually and partially reforming and modifying facticity. Hence, Kierkegaard stresses the interplay (or dialectics) between facticity and freedom. Human freedom is always situated in a particular context or situation that limits it. The result is a fundamental tension between freedom and facticity that is constitutive of human nature, since both freedom and facticity represent constitutive features of our nature.[6]

For that reason, any attempt to identify only with facticity or freedom is self-defeating and will result in double-mindedness. Unless freedom and facticity are reconciled, the tension between freedom and facticity results in double-mindedness that exaggerates either freedom or facticity. Someone who identifies with only one of these two constitutive features is double-minded, since he is split between what he identifies with and what he wants to avoid.

The Sickness unto Death argues that despair is dominated either by weakness or by defiance (SKS 11, 162 / SUD, 47). The "despair of weakness" does not want to be the self it is, whereas the "defiant" "desperately wants to be . . . a self that he is not (for the will to be the self that he is in truth is the very opposite of despair)" (SKS 11, 136 / SUD, 20). The "despair of weakness" understates the possibilities represented by freedom, while exaggerating limitations. The "defiant," by contrast, exaggerates possibilities, while understating limitations. Neither of them want to be themselves wholeheartedly, since both forms of despair identify with—or value—something they are not. Overcoming despair then requires accepting oneself completely by taking full responsibility for one's whole life here and now.[7] Without unconditional willingness to be itself, the self is double-minded, since it is split between ideals, which it identifies with, and reality, which it does not fully accept or endorse. Despair therefore refers to an unwillingness to accept human agency (cf. Kosch 2006, 142f., 154, 208).

3. WHOLEHEARTEDNESS AS CONSTITUTIVE OF SELFHOOD: COHERENT PRACTICAL IDENTITY

Kierkegaard thinks that despair is extremely common, since it results from a tension that is constitutive of human nature (i.e., freedom vs. facticity; defiance vs. weakness; activity vs. passivity). This tension will result in double-mindedness, unless the two opposites, such as freedom and facticity, are reconciled. In order to avoid double-mindedness, the agent therefore needs to

actively shape and unify his entire practical identity so that it becomes coherent.

However, this shaping requires a self with higher-order motives. *The Sickness unto Death* maintains that the potential for selfhood is latent in human nature, although the self cannot be identified either with human nature or with any of its constitutive features (facticity or freedom) (SKS 11, 129 / SUD, 13). Instead, selfhood requires higher-order motives that identifies with some lower-order motives, while distancing itself from other motives (Davenport 2012, 117). For Kierkegaard, the self is a reflexive self-relation that relates actively to human nature (and others) by forming higher-order motives and volitions. It is therefore conceived of in hierarchical and relational terms (Stokes 2015, 145; Davenport 2008, 239n).

However, nonideal selves that despair consciously differ from ideal, wholehearted selves. The former are double-minded, although they are aware of both despair and selfhood. The latter, by contrast, actively overcome despair at every instance by unifying their identity. (Human beings who are not selves, by contrast, lack higher-order motives.)

Kierkegaard emphasizes that only a wholehearted or unified self avoids double-mindedness (SKS 8, 138ff. / UD, 24ff.). However, in order to become wholehearted, the self needs an unreserved orientation toward the good that defines its whole identity. The self cannot shape and unify its whole identity if it is only conditionally, occasionally, or partially committed to some project. Instead, a coherent self, which unifies freedom and facticity, needs categorical commitment toward the good. Only such commitment always makes it possible to unify one's whole identity coherently and to coordinate different roles and various other projects. Without unreserved commitment to good, agency therefore lacks coherence and unity (Rudd 2012, 139f., 187f.).

There are two different problems here. One problem is that agency could be fragmented into different projects and roles that are not integrated as parts of a single life. Such a life would lack coherence and unity but it need not be contradictory. Another problem, however, is that agents may pursue projects and roles that are incompatible with each other, either in principle or in fact.

An underlying orientation toward good prevents these problems by being a meta-project that shapes, unifies, and coordinates all other projects and roles that we engage in. As such, it underlies the specific projects and roles that we have. However, not any categorical commitment to a project or cause will do if double-mindedness is to be avoided. Rather, we need a normative standard that makes it possible for agency to either fail or succeed in shaping and unifying its identity. This requires a fundamental form of normativity that is basic to human agency and selfhood. However, this normativity cannot be unique to each individual but must rather be shared by all agents, since our very self-relation is intertwined with our relation to others (cf. SKS 3, 250 / EO2, 262). In general, becoming a self requires ethics that is other-

regarding rather than egoistic or eudaimonistic (cf. SKS 7, 121ff., 385ff. / CUP1, 129ff., 423ff.). More specifically, proper self-love requires neighbor-love; and hope for ourselves requires hope for all others (SKS 9, 227ff., 246ff. / WL, 225ff., 246ff.; SKS 10, 127–32 / CD, 116–22).

Both our self-relation and our relation to others then involve a shared normative constraint, which Kierkegaard identifies with the good and the divine (SKS 9, 111–24 / WL, 107–21).[8] Kierkegaard holds the good to be inescapable (SKS 8, 123 / UD, 7). He writes, "[T]he person who in truth wills only one thing *can will only the good*. . . . The person who wills one thing that is not the good is actually not willing one thing; . . . he must be, double-minded" (SKS 8, 138–40 / UD, 24f.). Only categorical moral dedica-tion, therefore, allows wholeheartedness; anything else involves double-mindedness (Davenport 2012, chs. 3–4; Rudd 2012, chs. 2, 6–7; Fremstedal 2019, 326f.).

4. PRACTICAL COMMITMENTS REQUIRE HOPE

However, unconditional moral commitment do not suffice to rule out despair. Like anyone else, moral agents may experience loss, disappointment, or hardship and feel stuck in situations that appear hopeless. Moral agents may even suffer from depression or unhappiness that makes them self-preoccu-pied and therefore less responsive to the—morally decisive—needs of others (cf. Martin 2012, 109). Worse still, morality often requires sacrificing pru-dential interests. Conflict between morality and prudence can even lead to despair that weakens or deteriorates moral motivation. In situations that may involve either serious normative conflict or the experience of loss, disap-pointment, and hardship, there therefore is a tendency toward despair and—partially because of this—demoralization (i.e., a psychological loss of re-solve to continue to be moral) (cf. Adams 1987, 151ff.).

In many situations, it seems impossible or improbable to realize our ideals. Unless we manage to reconcile ideals and reality, by hoping (or be-lieving) in realizability, the result is a double-mindedness that is split be-tween the ideals it identifies with and the reality it is stuck with. Hope seems necessary, since moral commitments often transcend available evidence, making it necessary to act in the face of uncertainty and put up with difficul-ties. Indeed, moral agency often involves being committed toward projects whose feasibility cannot be known by us (cf. O'Neill 1997). Since evidence is insufficient, we then need hope that our projects can be realized.

Kierkegaard here accepts the broadly Kantian idea that our practical com-mitments clearly go beyond available evidence (cf. SKS 9, 229ff. / WL, 227ff.). Like Kant, he appeals to the hope that we can realize our moral (and

prudential) interest, even though it is not warranted by evidence.[9] Onora O'Neill makes a similar point, writing,

> [W]e must assume that . . . our future is one in which we can act, and in which the aim of moral action is not absurd: it must be possible to insert the moral action into the world. . . . [W]e are committed to moral aims whose feasibility we cannot prove theoretically; to make sense of this we need to postulate, assume, or hope for a human future that allows room for human progress. . . . [T]hese hopes for the future of humankind cannot be renounced if we are committed to morality. (O'Neill 1997, 282, 287f.)

The point is not that it psychologically hard to live without hope. Rather, it is that it is incoherent to live without hope, unless we also give up moral agency (O'Neill 1997, 284). Morality requires action, but this does not make sense unless the moral agent takes moral action to be possible. Moral agency that does not have any hope of making good by acting seems incoherent, since its ideals and values do not cohere with its perception of reality. Without hope, it cannot reconcile ideals and reality, and therefore finds itself stuck in a hopeless situation.

5. DIFFERENT TYPES OF HOPE: CHRISTIAN AND HUMAN HOPES

Kierkegaard describes hope as an expectation of the possibility of good (contrasting it with fear as an expectation of the possibility of evil—SKS 9, 249 / WL, 249). He seems to assume that what we hope for must be *possible* yet *uncertain*, if there is to be room and need for hope (cf. SKS 10, 117–24 / CD, 106–13; SKS 11, 153f. / SUD, 38f.). In addition, it must be *difficult* to attain, since there is hardly any need for hope if what we hope for is easily attainable (SKS 10, 117–24 / CD, 106–13).

The argument so far indicates that a unified practical identity requires hope of realizing moral commitments. However, Kierkegaard goes even further by arguing that hope and charity are insufficient, since Christian faith is also needed. Kierkegaard therefore distinguishes between Christian and non-Christian hopes (SKS 8, 214ff. / UD, 112ff.; SKS 13, 99, 103f. / FSE, 77, 82f.; Pap. VI B 53, 13 / JP 2, 1668). Non-Christian hope is not based on divine revelation and divine grace as Christian hope is. Kierkegaard therefore describes it as "natural hope" and "human hope." In the following, we will discuss human hope first and then turn to Christian hope and its justification.

Human hope takes many different forms. Kierkegaard here distinguishes between a pre-reflexive and reflective hope (Pap. VI B 53, 13 / JP 2, 1668). The former expects the possibility of good when the outcome is *objectively* uncertain, but it does not realize that it hopes for something that is uncertain

or difficult to attain, since it lacks reflection. This hope involves a pre-reflexive expectation similar to immediate trust or confidence (cf. Fremstedal 2014, 179). It appears identical or closely related to, the hope that Kierkegaard elsewhere claims "expects victory in everything" "without a struggle" (SKS 5, 29 / EUD, 20). It lacks reflection and experience, and assumes that everything is (humanly) possible (Lippitt 2015, 125).

Reflexive hope, by contrast, realizes that it hopes for something uncertain that is difficult to attain. The notions of possibility and uncertainty here are subjective notions, referring to how things appear to the agent. Kierkegaard claims that this hope is based on the calculations of the understanding (*Forstanden*—Pap. VI B 53, 13 / JP 2, 1668). Although he hardly explains what the understanding is, it nevertheless seems to involve the following elements:

1. It represents a natural human faculty, elsewhere described as reason (cf. Burgess 1994, 109–28).
2. It involves a rational capacity for calculation and manipulation, at least for practical purposes. It only allows risks that are likely to pay off.
3. It does not represent moral rationality, but rather prudential and instrumental rationality that is informed by experience.
4. It involves a naturalism that excludes reference to the supernatural and eschatology (Westphal 2014, 91ff.; Fremstedal 2014, 97, and ch. 7; Davenport 2008, 196–233).
5. It is concerned with what is humanly possible, not with what is divinely possible. More specifically, it is concerned with practical possibility in which an agent contributes to the realization of an end by acting. Mere metaphysical or divine possibility is not sufficient.
6. It seems to involve evidentialism about belief, according to which rational beliefs require sufficient evidence.

Based on this concept, Kierkegaard assumes that non-Christian hope is typically concerned with the pursuit of personal happiness. Moreover, he associates reflexive non-Christian hope with finite worldly wisdom that offers prudential advice based on experience, under the motto that everything only holds "to a certain degree" (SKS 5, 30 / EUD, 21).

However, Kierkegaard insists that non-Christian hope leads to hopelessness (cf. SKS 5, 100f. / EUD, 94f.). On the one hand, he argues that hopelessness results from misfortune, hardship, and distress (SKS 10, 117–24 / CD, 106–13). As we have seen, the idea seems to be that by suffering a loss or experiencing normative conflict, the agent gives up hope (see sections 1 and 4). On the other hand, Kierkegaard claims that one must despair or give up hope, since one fails to realize the infinite ethical requirement (SKS 9, 252, 261 / WL, 252, 262).[10] The latter claim suggests that the one despairs

(or that one *ought* to despair) because of one's moral shortcoming. But it could also mean that despair itself results from not just any moral failure but from the failure of unifying one's identity. Rather than presupposing immoral actions, despair then results from an incoherent identity that is morally objectionable.

Morality, hope, and despair are then interconnected. Like hope and despair, morality can be approached from both a non-Christian and a Christian perspective. Kierkegaard's "first ethics" represents non-Christian ethics, whereas the "second ethics" represents Christian ethics. Kierkegaard argues that the first ethics constitutes the natural starting point, although it collapses internally due to human guilt and sinfulness (SKS 4, 323ff. / CA, 16ff.). It fails to live up to its own ideals (and is therefore split between ideals and reality), something that involves despair (double-mindedness) that prepares the transition to Christian ethics.[11] Kierkegaard's argument here emphasizes the moral gap between our moral obligations and our natural capabilities.[12] This gap is closed by Christian ethics that relies on forgiveness of sins and divine assistance (SKS 4, 323ff. / CA, 16ff.). In addition, we will see that it involves hope against hope that radically transcends ordinary hopes.

To support his views, Kierkegaard relies on the classical idea that our final end is the highest good (Fremstedal 2014, chs. 5–6). Although he does not identify it with eudaimonia, he still takes the highest good to include virtue and happiness, describing it as eternal happiness (*Salighed*), which Christians may hope for or expect (SKS 5, 214, 250ff. / EUD, 214, 253ff.) (cf. Bernier 2015, 115; Lippitt 2013, 147ff.). In addition, he follows the Augustinian tradition by interpreting the highest good as an ethico-religious community—"the kingdom of God"—that cannot be realized by any individual alone (SKS 5, 255 / EUD, 258f.; SKS 7, 356 / CUP1, 391; SKS 8, 303–6 / UD, 208–12). It is the highest good in this collective form that represents the ultimate object of justified hope for Kierkegaard (as for Kant and much of the Augustinian tradition).[13]

However, this end cannot be realized by human effort alone. First, moral virtue is undermined by moral failure and evil. Second, we could end up being unhappy even if we were morally perfect. Finally, the highest good takes the form of a kingdom that cannot be realized by an individual alone. As a result, human agents cannot possibly realize the highest good even collectively, unless divine assistance is introduced. Secular hopes for the highest good must then be disappointed (Fremstedal 2014, ch. 9).

However, Kierkegaard maintains that Christian hope is only possible as a response against human despair (Pap. VI B53, 13 / JP 2, 1668). The reason for this is that Kierkegaard follows Paul in taking Christian hope to be "hope against hope," that is, as hope in a hopeless situation (SKS 13, 102–4 / FSE 81–83). The idea is that when everything breaks down due to despair, God offers new hope as divine gift that, once accepted, makes it possible to

overcome all human (non-Christian) despair (SKS 13, 102–4 / FSE, 81–83, cf. SKS 5, 100f. / EUD, 94f.; Pap. VI B 53, 13 / JP 2, 1668). It is only God, for whom everything is possible, that can guarantee that there is always hope (cf. SKS 11, 185 / SUD, 71). Only Christian religiousness overcomes all despair by hoping against hope.

Kierkegaard thinks that this hope is found in our innermost being, although we only become aware of it when we despair over our whole situation. Despair abandons human hope while procuring Christian hope (SKS 10, 121–23 / CD, 110–12, cf. SKS 8, 214ff. / UD, 112ff.). To procure this hope, we need to give up human hopes and to accept the gift of divine assistance (which is given universally).[14]

Kierkegaard maintains that the Christian hope for the highest good cannot be disappointed, since it is based on eschatology and patiently expects something that transcends our finite schedules and probabilities.[15] It is not a specific hope for a particular event (which may be disappointed) but something that lies beyond human calculation and all time limits (Lippitt 2015, 136ff.). As such, it may be realized in another form and at another time than expected. The assumption is that it will be realized somehow, sometime.

Like faith and charity, Christian hope is not based on evidence or knowledge. Rather, it goes beyond available evidence (cf. SKS 9, 229ff. / WL, 227ff.). Still, this does not amount to a blind leap of faith, since it is based on practical or pragmatic considerations. More specifically, religiousness fits a natural human need for coherent selfhood by offering a way out of despair and demoralization. Instead of being justified epistemically, religious hope and faith is then justified practically. Like Kant, Kierkegaard therefore seems to be a pragmatist (non-evidentialist) about belief and hope.[16] However, Kierkegaard goes beyond Kant by accepting not only (moral) natural theology but also divine revelation. The idea seems to be that Christian doctrine fits a natural need, although it cannot be reduced to human needs or natural theology since it relies on revelation, which has its own language and perspectives.

6. FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY

In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard emphasizes that Christian hope requires charity that expects good for both oneself and one's neighbor alike. Kierkegaard claims that charity mediates between hope for oneself and hope for all others. He writes, "[L]ove is . . . the middle term: without love, no hope for oneself; with love, hope for all others—and to the same degree one hopes for oneself, to the same degree one hopes for others, since to the same degree one is loving" (SKS 9, 259 / WL, 260).

Kierkegaard first claims that justified hope requires charity, since there are moral restrictions on hope.[17] He therefore holds that hope is nothing without love (SKS 9, 258 / WL, 259). He then claims that charity itself is "built up" (*opbygges*) and nourished by Christian hope (SKS 9, 248 / WL, 248). That is, hope cultivates and strengthens love and prevents us from giving it up by despairing. *Works of Love* therefore contrasts despair not only with hope but also with charity (SKS 9, 248–59 / WL, 248–60).

However, *The Sickness unto Death* contrasts despair with Christian faith, whereas *For Self-Examination* contrasts it with Christian hope (SKS 11, 195f. / SUD, 81; SKS 13, 99, 103f. / FSE, 77, 82f.). This suggests that only the theological virtues avoid despair (cf. SKS 8, 204f. / UD, 100f.; SKS 9, 227ff., 248ff. / WL, 225ff., 248ff.; SKS 10, 127–32 / CD, 116–22). Although these virtues represent character traits, it is still the case that they must be actively maintained and renewed if we are to be wholehearted agents. Despair must therefore be constantly overcome by hoping, believing, and loving. Gene Fendt comments:

> There is a unity of the theological virtues, but they are not the same thing. Insofar as faith believes God, believes in God, and believes that God makes good, it is distinct from hope which is an expectation of the good for both oneself and one's neighbor. But insofar as faith believes that God makes good it is inseparable from the hope which expects the good for both oneself and one's neighbor. If the first (faith) is given up, then the second (hope for both oneself and others) is *ipso facto* given up. If, on the other hand, one does not expect the good for both oneself and one's neighbor, then one lies if he says he has faith. (Fendt 1990, 168)

In a work influenced by Fendt, Mark Bernier concludes,

1. (1) [D]espair can be characterized as an unwillingness to hope an in authentic way;
2. (2) authentic hope [hope for eternal happiness, the highest good] constitutes the primary task of the self; and
3. (3) faith is a willingness to hope, wherein the self secures a ground for the possibility of hope. (Bernier 2015, 212)

However, (1) it is only complete despair over one's situation in general that involves an unwillingness to hope (in a hopeless situation) by rejecting Christian hope against hope. (2) It is not only hope but the theological virtues that constitutes the primary task of the self. These virtues represent intrinsic, non-instrumental goods essential to selfhood (cf. SKS 10, 129 / CD, 118). Finally, (3) faith is not identical to "a willingness to hope," but the theological virtues are interconnected. Kierkegaard emphasizes that hope is nothing without charity, although charity is nourished by hope (SKS 9, 248, 258 /

WL, 248, 259). Moreover, hope in God requires faith and trust in God and *vice versa* (Gouwens 1996, 157). The religious believer expects that good is possible for himself and his neighbor alike, since he believes that God makes good for all.

7. CONCLUSION AND COMPARISON WITH SCHOPENHAUER AND NIETZSCHE

Despite the fact that it is often neglected, Kierkegaard's account of hope lies at the very heart of his theory. Bernier therefore concludes, "[H]ope is a fundamental theme in Kierkegaard's narrative, connecting despair, faith, and the self. Indeed, we cannot adequately understand Kierkegaard's view without drawing out this theme of hope" (Bernier 2015, 212). As we have seen, Kierkegaard argues that hope is necessary in order to overcome double-mindedness. Wholeheartedness requires not only categorical moral dedication but also hope and faith that supports moral agency. However, even Christians become double-minded if they lack hope, faith, and charity. This means that shaping and unifying human identity is highly demanding on Kierkegaard's account. Double-mindedness is therefore far more common than wholeheartedness.[18]

Kierkegaard's account of hope deserves attention for the following reasons: it represents an existential account of hope that emphasizes the interrelation between hope and despair, seeing both as crucial for human agency and selfhood. More specifically, Kierkegaard defends the strong view that we should always hope for the good, no matter how bad the situation might be. Put differently, Kierkegaard therefore sees hope against hope as necessary for human agency and selfhood. His emphasis lies not so much on a description of what hope is as an analysis of what justified hope is. More specifically, he argues that justified hope is interrelated with charity and religious faith, and has the highest good as its proper object. As such, it belongs not only to a Judeo-Christian tradition that focuses on the Pauline triad of faith, hope, and charity but it also belongs to a philosophical tradition from Augustine and Kant that views the highest good (the *summum bonum*), a synthesis of virtue and happiness, as the ultimate object of hope. However, Kierkegaard goes beyond his forerunner by developing a *via negativa* approach to hope that starts with hopelessness and despair before it proceeds to hope. Indeed, Kierkegaard holds that proper hope, hope against hope, both presupposes and overcomes despair.

Kierkegaard differs from his contemporaries Schopenhauer and Nietzsche not only by viewing hope as valuable but also by viewing it as indispensable for human existence. Without hope, human selfhood and identity involves despair (and self-deception), Kierkegaard argues. Still, Kierkegaard does not

rule out the possibility of false hopes that may involve self-deception or irrationality. However, it is crucial to Kierkegaard that not all hopes are false, since there are justified hopes that are central to human existence. This means that Schopenhauer and Nietzsche may be justified in criticizing false hopes as long as this critique does not undermine hope altogether.

Schopenhauer argues that it natural for humans to hope, since hope expresses the will to life that lies at the ground of everything (cf. Schopenhauer 1974, vol. 2, §313). However, this will is not only blind and irrational but the source of all suffering. Schopenhauer therefore describes hope as a "folly of the heart" that confuses what we wish for with what is probable (Schopenhauer 1969, vol. 2, §313). Hope distorts our thinking by engaging in wishful thinking that increases suffering. On this pessimistic view, hopes inevitably lead to disappointment and suffering, since genuine, lasting satisfaction is impossible for us. Even if we are lucky and get what we hope for, this will not cause real happiness but only increase striving and suffering.[19] Ultimately, this view rests on the pessimistic claim that neither individual happiness nor moral improvement is humanly possible. Schopenhauer argues that comprehensive happiness involves final satisfaction, which is impossible, since our life oscillates between pain and boredom (Schopenhauer 1969, vol. 1, 312, 360; §§57, 65).

Still, Schopenhauer thinks that the experience of hopelessness—and not hope—is beneficial, since it facilitates an ascetic denial of the will to live. Only asceticism provides a permanent liberation from suffering, since it negates the will to life that causes suffering in the first place (aesthetic experience, by contrast, only provides a temporal escape from suffering) (Schopenhauer 1969, vol. 1, books 3–4). Although there is a tendency toward asceticism and pessimism in the late Kierkegaard as well, he still does not accept Schopenhauer's pessimism. Yet, he agrees with Schopenhauer that the experience of hopelessness is beneficial, since it rejects false hopes. However, whereas Schopenhauer uses hopelessness to deny the will to life, Kierkegaard uses it to highlight the Pauline idea of hope against hope, which promises hope in a hopeless situation. Whereas Kierkegaard advocates Christian hope, both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche reject religious hopes.

Nietzsche tends to share Schopenhauer's negative evaluation of hope as a form of self-deceived escapism. In *Human, All Too Human*, he describes hope as "the worst of evils because it prolongs the torments of man" (Nietzsche 2008, 53; *Human, All Too Human* §71). This claim, which is from his comment on the myth of Pandora, is reminiscent of Schopenhauer's view that hope leads to suffering. But in his later writings from the 1880s, Nietzsche offers a reason for rejecting hope that differs strongly from Schopenhauer's reason. The problem with hope is not that it increases suffering but rather that it involves nihilism (or pessimism). To hope is generally to hope for some perceived good that seems lacking in one's current situation. Hope

thereby depreciates reality, and values something else (e.g., the future) instead. It finds reality insufficient and the object of hope valuable. It thereby involves a nihilistic conflict between ideals and reality. Nietzsche writes, "A nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist" (Nietzsche 1999, vol. 12, 366; Nietzsche 1968, §585A). Nihilism presupposes that we hope for (or expect) values that is not found in the world (and that alternative values are lacking). The problem arises because our values or ideals are unrealistic and impossible to realize, both now and in the future. They cannot be realized in this world, and there is no other world in which they can be realized either (Reginster 2008, 8).

Nietzsche therefore associates hope with otherworldly escapism. This is the reason why he warns against those who speak of extraterrestrial hopes and dismisses hope in "hidden harmonies, in future blessedness and justice" (Nietzsche 1999, vol. 4, 15, and vol. 5, 74; Nietzsche 2006, 6; Nietzsche 2008, 560, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §55). Nietzsche's eternal recurrence of the same represents an influential alternative to the Platonico-Christian tradition that Kierkegaard represents. Nietzsche argues against this tradition and against escapism, other-worldliness, and transcendence that belittles or depreciates this world. From this perspective, Schopenhauer's atheistic pessimism is just as nihilistic as the religious tradition that Kierkegaard represents. Indeed, Schopenhauer belongs to the very same tradition from Nietzsche's perspective.

It is this tradition that Nietzsche wants to overcome by criticizing nihilism. Somewhat paradoxically, he describes the overcoming of nihilism (and pessimism) in terms of hope. He writes, for instance, "the bridge to the highest hope" is "that mankind be redeemed from revenge," something that refers to revenge as a reactive and nihilistic emotion (Nietzsche 1999, vol. 4, 128; Nietzsche 2006, 77). Nietzsche can thus be said to hope for the end of hope, by hoping to overcome the nihilism and hope of the tradition. He finds the tradition unacceptable, judging that it ought not to be, whereas the *Übermensch* that accepts the eternal recurrence of same does not yet exist. He thereby stands in danger of repeating the nihilism that he tries to overcome.

Somewhat surprisingly, Kierkegaard anticipates Nietzsche's warning against religious nihilism and escapism. In 1844, he writes,

> [T]he expectation of an eternal salvation is able (which otherwise seems impossible) to be two places at the same time: it works in heaven and it works on earth, "it seeks God's kingdom and his righteousness and gives the rest as an over-measure" (Matthew 6:33). If the expectancy does not do this, then it is fraudulent, the craftiness of a sick soul that wants to sneak out of life, and not the authentic presence of a healthy soul in the temporal; then it is not the

expectancy of the eternal but a superstitious belief in the future. (SKS 5, 255 / EUD, 259)

Unlike Nietzsche, Kierkegaard develops an anti-nihilistic, existential approach to religion, which makes it possible to orient oneself in this life (SKS 5, 256 / EUD, 259). Nothing seems to capture this better than the notion of hope against hope, which lies at the heart of Kierkegaard's theory.

NOTES

1. Whereas Rudd and Davenport argue that a coherent practical identity requires unconditional moral commitment, the present text argues that it also requires hope. More specifically, the text reconstructs Kierkegaard's argument for hope as essential to practical identity. The latter is understood as "a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking" (Korsgaard 1996, 101). See also Rudd 2012; Davenport 2012.

2. Notable exceptions include McDonald 2014; Fremstedal 2014, chapter 9; Bernier 2015; Sweeney 2016. To some extent, the present text draws on Fremstedal 2014, 2016, and 2019.

3. *The Sickness unto Death* is published under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus. However, Kierkegaard introduces Anti-Climacus only because he does not claim to live up to the latter's ideals, although he fully accepts these ideals and the views of Anti-Climacus. For this reason, we attribute the views of Anti-Climacus to Kierkegaard. See SKS 22, 130, NB 11:209 / KJN 6, 127.

4. For Kierkegaard's negativistic methodology, see Theunissen 2005 and Grøn 1997.

5. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vols. 1–15 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), vol. 12, 366; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Random House, 1968), §585A. There is substantial overlap between nihilism and despair (see Fremstedal 2016). Still, pessimism may only overlap partially with Kierkegaardian despair, since pessimism lacks hope but retains courage, whereas despair lacks both hope and courage. For pessimism, see Beiser 2016, 282.

6. Rudd 2012, 31ff.; Davenport 2008. At this point, Kierkegaard influenced continental philosophy from Heidegger to Sartre and Habermas. However, Rudd and Davenport also show that it is relevant to Anglophone philosophy after MacIntyre and Frankfurt. Davenport argues that Kierkegaard's account of human nature is either a two-aspect account of body and mind or some form of Aristotelean hylomorphism. See Davenport 2013, 234.

7. Stokes argues that selfhood in Kierkegaard concerns not only practical identity but also a naked (minimal) self that takes full responsibility for itself in the present. Exactly how the naked self relates to practical identity is a contested issue that I do not discuss here. See Stokes 2015, 167.

8. Lippitt 2013, 56f., 90ff., 121f. Kierkegaard *identifies* the good and the divine. See SKS 4, 160 / FT, 68; SKS 7, 133, 143 / CUP1, 142, 153f.; SKS 8, 151–53, 364, / UD, 39–41, 268. See also note 10 below.

9. Fremstedal 2014, chapter 9. In the context of religion, Kierkegaard repeatedly contrasts Kant's "honest way" with the dishonesty of post-Kantian philosophy (notably Hegelianism). See SKS 6, 142 / SLW, 152; SKS 19, 170, Not4:46 / KJN 3, 167; SKS 20, 229, NB2:235 / KJN 4, 229; SKS 22, 215, NB12:121 / KJN 6, 216f.; SKS 27, 390, 415, Papir 365:2, 369 / JP 1, 649, 654. For Kierkegaard's reference to Kant on hope, see SKS 19, 140, Not 4:11 / KJN 3, 139, 539; SKS K19, 198f.

10. In this context, "infinite" seems to mean "divine" and "inexhaustible," although it might also suggest that the ethical task is categorically overriding and highly demanding.

11. From the Christian perspective, Kierkegaard identifies despair with sinfulness. See part II of *The Sickness unto Death*, which has the title "Despair Is Sin."

12. Hare uses the moral gap to defend religious ethics, partially by basing his argument on Kant and Kierkegaard. See Hare 2002. For Kierkegaard's interpretation of original sin and radical evil, see Fremstedal 2014, chapter 2.

13. However, Kierkegaard accepts a Kantian critique of eudaimonism, denying that virtue should be motivated by the prospect of happiness. Cf. SKS 7, 367, 387 / CUP1, 403, 426; SKS 20, 223, NB 2:211 / JP 2, 1510; SKS 27, 277, Pap. 283:1 / JP 3, 2349.

14. Bernier has a long, critical discussion of Theunissen but he does not discuss Grøn's development of Theunissen's reading. Grøn claims that despair gives up hope, whereas Bernier claims that it rejects hope. However, Kierkegaard's point seems to be that despair abandons human hope *and* rejects Christian hope against hope. See Bernier 2015, chapter 4; cf. Grøn 1997, 142ff.; Theunissen 2005.

15. Cf. Roberts 2003, 192f., 200f. Kierkegaard endorses Paul's statement that someone who only hopes for this life is the most miserable of all. SKS 8, 329 / UD, 228, cf. CUP1, 389 / SKS 7, 355.

16. For Kierkegaard's pragmatism about belief, see Evans 1982; Emmanuel 1996; Fremstedal 2014, chapter 6. Kierkegaard does not distinguish between belief and faith, since the Danish "*Tro*" covers both terms, just like the German "*Glaube*."

17. Hope depends on *commanded* love: "Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love . . . eternally and happily secured against despair" (SKS 9, 36 / WL, 29).

18. Indeed, it is possible to be in despair without knowing it. This is a form of self-deception Kierkegaard calls "inauthentic despair." See SKS 11, 138–57, 209, 212 / SUD, 22–42, 96, 99f.

19. A similar point is made by Martin, who writes, "[T]here is no tight correlation between satisfying your desire and being satisfied with what you get. Hence the saying: Be careful what you wish for, lest you get it. . . . Even when realization brings satisfaction, the satisfaction is short lived, as we adjust and take for granted what we gained" (Martin 2012, 98).

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