

THE THINKER AND THE TRUTH
BRINGING SØREN KIERKEGAARD IN DISCUSSION
WITH REFORMATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

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In reformational philosophy engagement with Søren Kierkegaard never really did get off to a good start. The present contribution is meant to reintroduce Kierkegaard in reformational philosophical discussions by focusing on the question of truth. How does the thinker as thinker relate to truth and what is the role of the I-self relationship in the search for truth? As working hypothesis it is stated that Kierkegaard's many subtle analyses of the I-self relation can enrich reformational philosophical thinking about truth, by raising awareness for the intricate intertwinement between the object (the 'what') and the attitude (the 'how') of thinking.

First, the thesis of indirect communication in the work of some of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors will be investigated, including the question how this thesis affects the search for truth. Second, this thesis is compared with central concepts in reformational thinking, such as the heart, directedness at the Origin, and self-knowledge. Third, a brief review will be given of Climacus' famous thesis that truth is subjectivity. After this review, the focus finally again shifts toward reformational philosophy, especially the way it has dealt with the religious dynamic in theoretical thought.

It is concluded that there are differences in style, emphasis and conceptual 'framing' between Kierkegaard and Dooyeweerd, but that there are also many similar concerns and philosophical intuitions, more even than have been acknowledged so far in the literature. Kierkegaardian thinking is helpful in raising awareness of the tensions, ambiguities, and brokenness of our existence, even in the search for truth.

1. *Introduction*

In reformational philosophy engagement with Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855), never really did get off to a good start. This is both remarkable and unfortunate. It is remarkable because thinkers of the calibre of this Danish philosopher are few and far between; it is unfortunate because opportunities for deepening of insight have remained unexplored.

The fact that a discussion did not ensue is deplorable, but also understandable. In reformational circles the Kierkegaard reception took place under an unlucky star. Dooyeweerd, Zuidema and Mekkes considered existentialist philosophy as a form of irrationalism and turned to fierce combat against it. In the same period — between the 1930s and the 1950s — reformed theology engaged

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in discussion with dialectical theology. Both existentialism and dialectical theology were held to be strongly influenced by Kierkegaard's thinking. In the battle against the two an image of Kierkegaard asserted itself that was stamped by existentialist ideas on freedom, contingency, and individuality. This image arises, for instance, in the remarkably critical chapter in *Denkers van deze tijd* by S. U. Zuidema (1953). It is my impression that it was this text that has set the tone of the discussion (see also Van der Hoeven 1993). In the chapter Zuidema criticizes Kierkegaard's concept of freedom for its arbitrariness, its lack of recognition of creational structures, and its wrong view on history.

One might ask to what extent the interpretation of Kierkegaard by Zuidema and others rested on a one-sided focus on certain aspects of his work. So much is clear: there is more to Kierkegaard than the proto-existentialist later interpreters have made of him. To mention one obvious point, Kierkegaard's Christianity is not superficial, not merely the icing on the cake. It lies at the very heart of his philosophical endeavour.¹ Existentialist philosophers tend to ignore the ethical and religious slant of Kierkegaard's thought. Accordingly, key concepts such as the individual, passion, and the moment, are given a colouring inspired by an a-religious humanism (like in Heidegger) and by a negative notion of freedom (absence of determination), like in Sartre.² However, works like *The Concept of Anxiety* and of *Sickness unto Death* clearly show that the freedom of Kierkegaard's pseudonym authors is not negative, but positive; more specifically, that freedom finds its fulfilment in a deepening of the I-self relationship that results from a deepening of the relationship toward an eternal God, who has become incarnated in history (see later in this article).³

Zuidema does not go so far as to interpret Kierkegaard as the Sartrean protoexistentialist of the previous paragraph. He knew of both the existentialist and the religious Kierkegaard. His point is rather that Kierkegaard's philosophy of time is wrong and that, in consequence, the existential and the religious aspects of his thinking are vulnerable of being separated. It was Kierkegaard's own philosophy of time which paved the way for later existentialist misinterpretations, according to Zuidema. Towards the end of this article, we will consider the validity of this interpretation.

¹ See Evans (2006, chapter 1) for a defence of the Christian reading of Kierkegaard's philosophical oeuvre. In a similar vein Vos (2002, 38), Doedens (1999, chapter 1), Gouwens (1996), and Walsh (2009).

² Freedom is a fate, according to Sartre (1943), it is the inescapable condition of being a *pour-soi*, a subject that relates to itself. Freedom consists of the inability to give up this relatedness and the negativity that comes with it. Freedom is negating one's own matter-of-factness (one's being *en-soi*) and at the same time the inability to not do this. Kierkegaard's freedom represents, as we will see, a complete reversal of the freedom of the Sartrean subject.

³ In the edifying works, in the diaries and also in *Works of Love* the image of individualism is put into new light.

2. *Delineating topics in the landscape: self-relatedness in the search for truth, philosophy, worldview*

The present contribution is meant to reintroduce Kierkegaard in reformational philosophical discussions and to stimulate further reflection on his work. I restrict myself to an issue that plays an important role both in Kierkegaard's work and that of reformational philosophers, i.e. the question as to how to conceive the role of the I-self relationship in the search for truth.

The hypothesis guiding this article is that the I-self relationship indeed does play a role in the search for truth. The kind of truth that is meant here, is 'existential' truth, truth that matters, truth, in other words, that is not some objective over-against, not just the sum of true statements about a certain topic, nor just the value of a set of propositions; but truth that (above this all) affects and engages me and invites me to adopt the 'right' stance towards it. By trying to gain access to this type of truth we are already acting and reacting on it and (implicitly) adopting a stance, a stance that reveals my attitude toward it, and, thereby, discloses something about myself.⁴

These formulations suggest a doubling of the relationship to truth. We have a relationship toward truth: we affirm it, we deny it, or mould it opportunistically. And by doing so (affirming, denying, moulding) we reveal something about ourselves. This 'revealing' (or: disclosing) is an expression of what I call the I-self relationship. By relating to a particular truth I am at the same time also implicitly relating to myself. My question is in what way this self-relatedness is itself influencing my relation to truth. Take for example painful truths. When hearing a painful truth, I may feel the inclination to resist hearing it. By giving in to this inclination I reveal something about myself, for instance, that I cannot stand the truth, or that I lack courage. This in turn affects my relation toward truth: by not resisting my inclination I may fail to take responsibility. And this failure may contribute to the distortion or even the denial of truth. So, there is a relation to truth, which affects the relation to myself, which in its turn may affect my relation to truth.

Now, suppose that we see religion as the expression of one's orientation to ultimate concerns; that we think that the Christian philosopher needs to address this orientation, not only as general topic, but also in the self-referential way indicated above; i.e., as an articulation of the way one is engaged, as thinker, with these ultimate concerns. Then, on this presupposition, the analysis of one's self-relatedness, one's way of philosophically addressing the ultimate concerns just mentioned, would be of great importance for the project of Christian philosophy. This is, indeed, my hypothesis. It makes sense to relate the

⁴ A similar structure holds for emotions: they tell something about the situation I am in and at the same time disclose something about me, whether I am aware of it or not. My irritation is, for instance, directed at the inappropriate behavior of a motor driver in the traffic on my way home after a busy day and it at the same time reveals something about me, for instance about my level of anger after a frustrating day. The irritation says something about the person in the traffic *as well as* about me. Applied to truth: my search for truth discloses, at a certain point in time, aspects of truth *as well as* aspects of myself; for instance, how I am involved in the search for truth; how truth has begun to affect my life during this search and how I react to that.

search for truth to self-relatedness and self-referentiality, regardless of whether one addresses the issue from a Kierkegaardian or a Dooyeweerdian point of view.

For Kierkegaard, to be sure, philosophy must deal with ultimate concerns, if it is to be of any value for real life. Thinkers aim at truth. Kierkegaard's work can be interpreted as one, long, (hyper)sensitive search for how the thinker as thinker relates to truth. Truth can be approached objectively, for instance, when the individual reflects on the true God. But it can also be approached subjectively, according Climacus. This occurs when we concentrate on the way of relating and investigate whether the self-relatedness that is implied in this relating is consonant with having 'in truth a God-relation'. For Climacus bringing together these two positions, the objective and the subjective position, is not a matter of synthesis by reflection, because in reflection the tension between the two perspectives would evaporate. Bringing together the two attitudes (perspectives) requires passion, i.e., the passion of faith (Kierkegaard 1846/1992, 199; SKS VII, 166-167; see also later in this text).

Something similar, but phrased in a totally different way, holds for reformational philosophy. Truth and meaning are revealed in the directedness of the heart toward the Origin, says Dooyeweerd. Even theoretical truths should be seen as related to and directed by the heart, or self(hood), of the thinker. This rootedness in a 'self' implies a form of self-relatedness, a critical openness for the way the thinker finds and places himself in the spiritual battle of his time, even in the most theoretical forms of intellectual activity. More technically, and in the language of Dooyeweerd's systematic philosophy, this openness consists in a readiness to see reality in the light of the anticipatory direction in the opening-up of law spheres. This readiness requires critical self-reflection; and is guided by faith (as mode of functioning). Intellectual openness and spiritual openness go together, so to say. Intellectual openness will bear fruit when it is rooted in the heart and when the heart is directed at the Origin of meaning. So far Dooyeweerd.

The guiding idea behind the present text is that thinking about the relationship between the thinker and the truth, especially in the context of reformational philosophy, can be enriched by a 'Kierkegaardian' focus on self-relatedness in its many different and subtle forms. First, I will consider the question of the truth as seen in the light of the thesis of indirect communication in the work of some of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors. Second, I compare this thesis to a number of thoughts within reformational philosophy. Third, I comment on Climacus' thesis that truth is subjectivity. Finally I give a more focussed assessment of what Kierkegaard and reformational philosophy may have to say to one another.

One additional qualifier before we proceed. To understand what follows, the reader should at least be open to the suggestion that truth is not only determined by the content of one's knowledge, but also by the way this knowledge is communicated about. Readers, in other words, especially those who have been raised in the analytic tradition, should be willing to — at least temporarily — give up the idea of truth as just a quality or value of

propositions.⁵ The presupposition of the present text is that truth, at least some truths, have an existential meaning and that they cannot be isolated from one's stance toward it. They cannot be isolated from truthfulness and, in fact, a whole lot of other values that are transmitted while communicating about what we think to be true.⁶

3. *The thesis of indirect communication*

It is no exaggeration to say that Kierkegaard's authorship is determined by an abhorrence of abstraction and by the quest for contact with life in its existential depth. As known, Kierkegaard published virtually all of his philosophical works under pseudonyms. There has been much to do about this.⁷ Kierkegaard himself also wrote about it, for instance in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Kierkegaard 1846/1992; SKS VII, 212-257, 545-549) and in *My Point of View of my Work as an Author* — a work that has not been taken seriously by all Kierkegaard scholars (Kierkegaard 1859/2009).

The general idea behind this conception of authorship is that life cannot be described from one single point of view — that of a super-author with a helicopter view. Kierkegaard never came to view his authorship as representing a whole or a totality. To Kierkegaard the issue is a fundamental one and connected with the thesis of indirect communication (Kierkegaard 1846/1992; SKS VII, 55-62). It is in terms of 'indirect communication' that we can understand Kierkegaard's reliance on pseudonyms; and the odd combination of an intensive quest for contact, reality, and truth, and the irregular, often

⁵ For many analytic philosophers this will not be so difficult, after all, since they are familiar with the analysis of performative language (Austin 1962; Searle 1969). The idea of this theory is that in everyday situations the language we use is not just a description of a reality outside language, but primarily a way of performing or bringing about something. Examples of performative language use are promises, assertions, declarations, announcements, prohibitions (and so on). By promising, asserting, declaring et cetera, we put ourselves in a normative relation to a certain audience about a future event, the truth of an idea or of a particular state of affairs, and so on. The promise that I will meet someone tomorrow at nine, turns both on *what* is said and on *the relation* between me, myself and the hearer to whom I make my promise. By promising I bind my trustworthiness to my keeping of the promise. Self-relatedness is implied here in the sense that by keeping the promise I am entitled to consider myself trustworthy.

⁶ To illustrate this with another example: telling the truth to a patient, for instance someone with a malignant tumor, is not just enumerating the facts about the tumor; it also implies that the physician imagines what it means to suffer from cancer; that he weighs his words in the communication of 'facts'; and that he is sensitive to the specific role he has with respect to the patient. The truth of having a malignant tumor is, in other words, not the enumeration of all known facts about the tumor, but the meaning of these facts in the specific situation of this patient. Relating to this specific situation requires sensitivity with respect to one's role. Relating to one's role is a way of relating to oneself, i.e. to the role one has with respect to this patient (or the role the patient has toward him- or herself as patient).

⁷ For a clear and very helpful introduction and overview of how the thesis of indirect communication is connected with the pseudonymous authorship, see Evans (2009, chapter 2).

laborious, alternately humoristic, irritating and frankly tedious style of approaching his topic.

The term 'indirect' should be read as in contrast with 'direct', which in the case of Climacus — the pseudonym author who voices the position of the sceptical humorist — means: objective, factual, as a state of affairs one can be informed about. Truth does not tolerate such 'directness'. It is no chunk of information, no non-contextual knowledge to be dredged up at will, no some objective 'over against' to be discussed at distance. Those who relate to truth in such way, turn truth into an abstraction. Truth evaporates in these cases; it ultimately turns into illusion and changes into something fantastical, according to Climacus. If there be truth it must come to expression in the manner one lives. Such truth presupposes soundness in one's way of self-relating.

This is a fundamental point for Kierkegaard: The embodiment of truth by real, flesh-and-blood people requires transparency in the relationship of the person with him- or herself. Truth, in other words, implies truthfulness and truthfulness can only be communicated when the manner of communication is consonant with that which is communicated. The how (the form, outwardness) and the what (the substance, interiority) of the truth cannot be viewed separately. Content and form, the message and the messaging, should be in tune. Searching for truth requires utter sensitivity to style, attitude and proper ways of self-relating.

At the background of these convictions we can suspect an allergy to a Christendom that considers itself capable of codifying its truth and whose deeds deny its spoken confession. This allergy left deep traces in Kierkegaard's own life history. Still, at stake here is not a psychological motive alone, but first of all a systematic point: the transparency of the relationship of the writer to him- or herself.

This transparency can be acquired when two points are acknowledged. The matter of truth is first of all larger than us. It is not exhausted by what people think, want, or feel. The pseudonymous author refers to these 'matters of truth' with terms like infinity, the eternal, necessity, beatitude, power, and — indeed — truth. They are the objects of our desires and thoughts. However, they cannot be conceptually grasped; they can only be 'approximated', to use the expression Climacus tends to favor; they simply escape from attempts at objectification. Then, secondly, these 'matters' are real insofar as they concern me; more precisely: they are real to the degree that they are lived and become visible in my doings.⁸ Every attempt to arrive at an 'objective' determination of the truth (infinity, beatitude, eternity) — in thought or doctrine — turns truth into an abstraction and thus into illusion (Kierkegaard (1846/1992, SKS VII, 157-165). Such attempts testify of mental empty-headedness, according to Climacus. They drive truth to the point where it vanishes. Hegel is Climacus' favourite example. He built an impressive system but forgot to include himself. He acted like the man who built a large and beautiful home but forgot that he had to live in it and finally found himself sleeping in the doghouse next to his

⁸ Because of this emphasis on lived experience it would be better to call Kierkegaard the first philosopher of life rather than to speak of him as founding father of existentialism.

castle (Kierkegaard 1848/1980, SKS XI, 158-159; compare Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 65 ff).⁹

These two points indicate what Climacus means when he says that we have a double relation to truth: we relate to something that cannot be identified because it is larger than us, and this 'something' simultaneously determines us in our relationship to it (truth). Truth is both ethereal and concrete at once; it is both absent and present, it is objective and subjective. We cannot grasp it and we nevertheless respond to it in our attempt to grasp it.

This 'doubling' in the relation to the truth leads to tensions that cannot be overcome by mere reflection. The appropriation by which truth is interiorized does not consist of a state of tranquillity, but is in fact a movement full of tension. The appropriation is the attempt to bring together the objective and subjective moment. This occurs in the state of passion. We relate to the truth in 'pathos', i.e. in desire, conceived as 'infinite interest'. This interest is not extinguished (or: 'negated') once faith is found. Faith, rather, retains and deepens the interest. Identification with the object of faith is impossible; this object (God) can only be thought of in terms of approximation. Faith, therefore, will never be a condition of rest and relaxation, it is — to paraphrase Climacus — a passion which deepens the more we allow truth (God) to have an impact on our lives, on the way we are oriented, also on the way we are oriented with respect to our own lives. The more pathos deepens the more faith increases.

This tension is referred to with terms like 'paradox' and 'leap'. Faith is paradoxical in the sense that the infinite joins the finite in a way that retains the difference between the two. The more perfect one's faith, the deeper one's awareness of the incommensurableness between the frailty of faith and the sublime nature of the objects of faith. To the degree that faith gains depth, the inexpressibility and absurdity of faith is affirmed rather than reduced.

Something similar holds for faith as leap. In faith the world of doubt and alienation is not left behind. The leap does not end in a world of peace, harmony, and total insight. That is a misunderstanding. In the leap it is the leaping that counts rather than the landing site.¹⁰ Faith does not pave the way; it holds on to and interiorizes the obstacles: fear, doubt, and 'dizziness', as results of the enormous distance between our frailty and the greatness of what/who we long for.

⁹ Caution is needed because Kierkegaard's pseudonyms primarily leveled their criticism at Danish followers of Hegel and not Hegel himself.

¹⁰ Compare the humorous but also somewhat wry passage in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* where Lessing and Jacobi are in conversation. Lessing is an important discussion partner for Climacus (with Kierkegaard behind him), because he asks the question as to how eternal (rational) truths can be founded in contingent historical facts. Lessing thinks that the gap cannot be closed by means of reason and that a leap must be made. Jacobi tries to tempt him to leap by suggesting that Lessing will be successful if he can find an elastic jumping board. Lessing answers that even then his old legs and heavy head will make it impossible for him to leap. The entire 'humorous' passage makes clear that the topic of discussion is not the leap as such, but, rather, how one relates to the leap. The gap has no 'objective' width. The longer one lingers in a situation of fear and horror the more the gap widens (Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 74-85).

An example of how the double relationship toward truth works in practice, may be helpful at this point in our discussion. It is an example about the relation between the author and his or her text and, also, about the implicit internal criticism between the pseudonymous characters.

How does a writer find the beginning? How is the relation to his subject historically possible? These questions are not entirely unexpected. If one does not already have the truth in one's possession and if on the other hand truth cannot be approached by way of approximations (as in the objectifying approach), then it is important to align the advent of truth with the process of writing and/or thinking itself. In writing and thinking it is crucial to find the right stance. The writer does not create his material *ex nihilo*. Nor does she just encounter it. The crucial task for the writer is to attune to a matter that at the very moment of its articulation tends to recede. No wonder that Kierkegaard puts so much effort in descriptions of atmosphere, mood, and the like. It is in this twilight zones of awareness that the relationship between the thinker and her material begins to take on shape.

A significant part of Kierkegaard's authorship consists in carrying on and writing down the struggle of finding a beginning and of adopting the proper attitude to the material. All of this takes place from the point of view of the various pseudonyms. And these in turn express themselves, from their own perspective, about each other and many other prototypical characters and situations. *Either/Or* is an excellent example of this struggle (Kierkegaard 1843/1995). The text opens with a mystification, mostly pointing forward to later themes (as the relation between interiority and outwardness). Victor Eremita presents himself in the Preface as the delivery man of an unordered stack of texts that came into his possession through happenstance. He found them in a secret drawer — interior — of a cabinet he had bought, more or less by accident. He describes how he waited five years before publishing them (in case an author would reveal himself); how he arranged the texts as well as he might into those of author A, later called the aesthete, and author B, later named the ethicist; and how in delivering the texts he sought no order at all (in his diary Kierkegaard came to contradict this). By underscoring his disinterest it is clear that Eremita as deliverer/publisher has no 'intent' with the text and that he is completely effacing himself with respect to its interpretation. The text must speak for itself. This presentation indirectly makes clear the difficulty for an author who — unlike Victor Eremita — does have 'serious' intent. Authors who 'mean' something with the text often make things too difficult for themselves, for instance because the reader is more concerned with the question as to what the content reveals about the author and his intent, rather than with the matter itself.¹¹

¹¹ In relation to the authorship of *Either/Or* Malantschuk (1971) introduces additional links, by pointing to Kierkegaard's dissertation on irony and to Kierkegaard's turning away from the plan to publish a work entitled *Johannes Climacus, or de omnibus dubitandum est*. This work did get written, but remained unpublished (see *Papirer* IV B1). Kierkegaard values doubt, for it teaches us not to take existence and thought for granted. At the same time it can, as existential stance, render existence hopeless and lame. In this connection Kierkegaard speaks of despair. In irony despair is at a distance, but its stagnating influence is

How difficult it is to give a positive twist to this self-relatedness and to interiorize in a proper way, becomes clear in another major text, the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Initially this text was meant to be a 'serious' concluding statement to *Philosophical Fragments* (Kierkegaard 1846/1992; Kierkegaard 1844/1985, respectively). Nevertheless, this 'serious' work is presented from the point of view of the critical humorist Climacus. This humorist makes things even harder for himself because of his ultra-critical attitude: at some point in his life he decided never to agree with anybody. Armed with this intention he goes in search of an answer to the question 'What does it mean for me to be a Christian'? As the text proceeds it seems that the weapons turn against the author himself. Climacus constantly relativizes the beginnings of insight and authenticity that seem to emerge. By subtly fooling himself, the author seems to torpedo the entire enterprise. Still, the text can be read quite differently too (Hannay 2001). It is the ultimately untenable position of the satirical humorist — who becomes a caricature of himself — that makes clear how restricted the humorist perspective is, and that being-a-Christian implies an essentially different relation to the truth. The humorist can only describe the conditions of faith in a negative way, namely, by underscoring the absurd and the absence of an object. Especially in the edifying works Kierkegaard corrects this image.

4. *Preliminary exploration of the reformational philosophical view*

It seems worthwhile to interrupt our argument here for a moment to consider how Kierkegaard's posing of the problem relates to reformational philosophical insights.

Let us begin with a specific question, the question of how the thinker relates to his own authorship. Can the philosopher identify himself with his own work? Can he talk about 'my philosophy'? Traditionally, philosophy — particularly philosophy of the metaphysical and rationalistic kind — avoids such individualism. After all, philosophy aims to overcome the local perspective and to address the community of thought across the ages. Reaching over contemporaries, the philosopher engages in debates with the classics and the great philosophies of the Middle Ages and Modernity. Reaching beyond himself and across time, the philosopher leaves his own local perspective behind. His philosophy is no longer 'his'. This is what Kierkegaard means when he says that thinkers tend to 'lose' themselves. They 'lose' themselves (or: their selves) in what surpasses them. On the other hand, such thinkers do not enter a timeless space. In their thinking and in their claims regarding the universal they remain

 already at work. Doubt, then, is ambiguous. This means that there is no straightforward route from ironic doubt to a life in which doubt is transformed into self-effacing engagement. To find that path a number of intermediate stages need to be investigated. Kierkegaard does so in *Either/Or* and elsewhere. As to the relation with the dissertation on irony — this work is still light in tone. Irony is described in terms of the contrast between the comical and the tragic. In *Either/Or* irony takes on the form of unhappiness. Irony is no longer naïve; it is marked by accident and fate (compare Malantschuk 1971, 217), thereby indicating a deepened form of self-relatedness compared to the earlier irony.

bound to their own historical and social perspective. The struggle of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy consists in the search after a relationship between these two perspectives, the personal and the universal. This relationship is seldom without tension. And this in turn renders talk of ‘my philosophy’ or ‘my work’ rather paradoxical.¹²

How does reformational philosophy relate the personal perspective to the universal intention? The then retiring Chairman of the Association for Reformational Philosophy, Sander Griffioen (2003, 241-274), gave his valedictory speech the title ‘My philosophy’. In the opening sentences he states that the title is meant ironically. But gradually this irony proves but relative. As the argument progresses it grows more serious. Christian philosophizing, says Griffioen, knows that its attachment and its dynamics is determined by a reality that escapes purely conceptual understanding. In virtue of its universal intent genuine philosophy will not lock itself up in a local ‘me’-perspective. At the same time all philosophy, including Christian philosophy, is wholly local, that is, contextual, for its every fibre is bound to concrete life and to the contemporary intellectual debate. However, difference, diversity and social-cultural determination detract nothing from the larger perspective. All reality, in its bewildering variety is, at a deeper, religious level, a whole. This totality can never completely be grasped and understood. But this is no demerit for our knowing, because — to put it very briefly — knowing can rely on its being upheld by trust: trust in our knowing faculties, trust in the reality of certain principles and norms, and trust in the Origin of meaning. Trust has its wellspring, so to say, in the divine *a priori* of creation, fall and renewal. So far, Griffioen.

It seems from this account that the intricacy of aligning writer and subject is not so much of a problem for Griffioen. A similar impression prevails when one reads work of other reformational philosophers. We search in vain for the torment of some of Kierkegaard’s pseudonym authors who attempt to establish a proper attitude toward their subject. We don’t find lamentations about the impossibility of an objective account of truth. The ‘subjectivity’ of the thinker is addressed in terms of having a ‘local perspective’, of contextuality, and of particularity. Reformational philosophers are aware of the possible tensions between different perspectives, they speak about the brokenness and ambiguity of our philosophical understanding, but these tensions, ambiguity and brokenness are overarched by the idea of a totality of meaning. In contrast to Climacus, main proponents of the Reformational tradition do not see a structural problem here. If there is a tension, this is due to apostate tendencies in our heart, that enter into our life- and worldviews and lead to absolutization of certain aspects, or parts, of reality. However, these tensions can be addressed and corrected.

¹² One elaboration of this thought could be that post-modern philosophers are far less ironic — at a distance — regarding themselves as they purport to be. The post-modern philosopher does not forget himself; rather, he inserts himself prior to all discourse on the universal and on the community of thought. In Kierkegaardian terms he takes himself far too seriously by continually letting his own historical shaping and the perspectivism of his perspective dominate the picture.

Typical in this respect is what Henk Geertsema says about the ‘human’ character of knowing. Contextuality and individuality should not primarily be seen as restrictions of our knowing capacities, he says. They are in fact expressions of being placed in a normative and temporal context. This contextuality is not chaotic and contingent, but characterized by coordinates such as ‘meaning’, ‘law’, ‘subject (to the law)’, ‘creation as promise-imperative’, and ‘createdness as a way of responding’. The wholeness that we humans long for, is at bottom a religious unity found ‘in’ the relation to the Creator and to Christ; and not in humans or in human nature or in a given idea of a totality of being(s) (Geertsema 1992, 130).

Reformational philosophers, in other words, see no fundamental tension between the manifoldness and particularity of subjective perspectives and the unity of these perspectives in the relation to Christ. The idea of unity is not a theoretical concept, according to Dooyeweerd, but a ‘religious-transcendental idea’, a boundary idea we need in order to guide our theoretical intuitions. Something similar holds for the idea of totality. Wholeness is an expression of the underlying unity. This idea cannot fully be grasped conceptually. It should, nevertheless, be presupposed, as theoretical idea guiding our thoughts to what transcends our theoretical understanding and as religious promise.

However, and secondly, at other places Dooyeweerd does give rise to the idea of more intrinsic limitations in our relation to truth. I am referring here to what he says about the perspectival structure of knowing truth. This perspectival structure consists of the relationship between four horizons: a religious horizon, the horizon of cosmic time, the modal horizon and the plastic horizon (or: the horizon of knowledge of individuality structures, *NC II*, 560). Each of these horizons seems bound up with a specific epistemic attitude: a religious attitude, an orientation to unity and totality, a directedness to modal spheres and an attitude directed to individuality structures (things in terms of their structural and individual identity), respectively. The perspectives relate to distinct ways of knowing. The most important similarity with Kierkegaard is — again — the rejection of the possibility of a theoretical totality view. The wholeness of reality is a background intuition of our daily lives. In theoretical thought it is only given as religious-transcendental idea.

Fundamental as this distinction between epistemic attitudes is, it does not lead to separation between epistemic realms or splitting up of the notion of truth. Cutting through all the (horizontal) perspectives there is the vertical dimension, the religious directedness of the ‘full’ selfhood towards the Origin of meaning. This selfhood is the heart of all human existence, hence of both ‘naïve experience’ and theoretical thought. In Dooyeweerd truth refers first of all to being properly attuned in this ‘vertical’ orientation, rather than agreement between reality and thinking in each of the (horizontal) perspectives. Truth does not first of all consist in the agreement between thinking and being, experience and reality. It consists in something deeper, namely ‘being (standing) in the truth’ (*NC II*, 571). This stance is expressed as the firmness and

certainty granted to humans in their earthly life when the selfhood — guided by Word revelation — orientates itself to the Origin of meaning.¹³

This last formulation suggests, again, both a noteworthy similarity and a difference with the Danish thinker. Both thinkers agree that truth is first of all lived and should be seen as rooted at the deepest level of our selfhood, where we are open toward the Origin of meaning. This is the point both thinkers endorse. The difference is that in Dooyeweerd's approach opening oneself does not lead to (temporary) exclusion of other or preceding perspectives. The perspectives (religious, cosmic, modal, plastic) add to one another. For Dooyeweerd, in other words, the perspectival structure of truth does not imply exclusion, but points to the limitations of our knowing faculties; limitations that in a certain way are superseded by the religious-transcendental intuitions of coherence, unity and origin. For Kierkegaard the relationship to truth remains bound to what he calls the moment (actual). The adoption of a proper attitude requires self-inquiry and, in fact, a whole number of virtues: truthfulness, honesty, self-sacrifice, and the transformation of anxiety into a willingness to surrender. And even then, if all these requirements are met, our stance toward truth remains paradoxical and double.

5. *Truth as subjectivity*

I turn back to Kierkegaard. What does it mean to say that truth resists objectification? Does it mean that truth completely escapes objectification? Or does it escape complete objectification? And what happens to the thinker in the movement of interiorizing and deepening?¹⁴ Does interiorizing and deepening confirm something that was already there, or is the renewal complete?

Kierkegaard and reformational philosophers agree with the idea that thinking, by concentrating on truth, undergoes a deepening and, even, a reversal. This is expressed by Kierkegaard's notion of passion. Belief as passion shows a more than superficial resemblance with 'dunamis', the term Dooyeweerd uses to indicate the dynamic component of religion, which for him is first of all a driving force. But does such deepening and reversal disrupt all continuity and coherence? Does the thinker leave everything behind?

¹³ Dooyeweerd puts it this way: "The transcendent, religious fullness of Truth does not concern an abstract theoretical function of thought. It is concerned with our full *selfhood*, with the *heart* of the whole of human existence, consequently also the centre of our theoretical thought." (NC II, 571) He refers subsequently to Vollenhoven, who discovered that the word truth in the Scriptures refers to steadfastness, certainty, reliability. Dooyeweerd continues (NC II, 571-2): "the fullness of the meaning of truth is a matter of revelation, when through our faith function we acquire full confidence in the reliability of God's Word, trust in God as the origin and source of all truth, and faith in Christ as the perfect Revelation of God." He continues: "But there is one thing a truly Christian philosophy should never doubt, viz. that all relative truths, within the temporal horizon, are only true in the fullness of Verity, revealed by God in Christ. Any hypostatizing, i.e. any absolutizing of that which is relative, turns truth into falsehood." (NC II, 572). Zuidervaart (2008a, 2008b, 2009) has criticized Dooyeweerd's notion of 'standing in the truth'. My response to his position can be found in Glas (forthcoming).

¹⁴ See for what follows also Hamilton (1998) and Evans (2006, chapters 2, 7, 10).

Reflection on Kierkegaard's thesis that 'truth is subjectivity' may shed light on this issue. I will take as guide three notions: objectivity, system, and world history.

To put us in the right position for reflection on this thesis, let me first briefly point out how the pseudonymous authors understand the concepts of self, subjectivity, self-relatedness, and the thesis of the subjectivity of truth. In a cautious interpretation this thesis means that truth is always truth in relation to a human being rather than a truth by itself. The thesis implies more specifically that truth expresses itself not only in more insight into truth, but also in a deepening of the relationship to truth which is *also* a deepening of the relationship with oneself. Subjectivity refers to this interior aspect of the I-self relationship. This interiority does not aim at the inner life of a solipsistic *cogito*. It is a form of (self)relatedness that is embedded in other relationships.¹⁵

The self is a relational category. It is, according to Anti-Climacus (Kierkegaard's most Christian pseudonym) in *Sickness unto Death*, "a relation which relates to itself, or, that in the relation which is its relating to itself. The self is not the relation but the relation's relating to itself." Somewhat further Anti-Climacus calls the self the 'positive third'. The self can only be positive because it is established by something else, outside itself (Kierkegaard 1848/1980, SKS IV, 129). Later in the text this 'something else' is called a power, in which the self is 'transparently' grounded (Kierkegaard 1848/1980, SKS IV, 130, 161, 164, 242).

To paraphrase these formulations: We humans are not able to posit ourselves. We need a transcendent power to give ground, and thereby life, to whom we are. This power is a *dunamis* that both hurts and opens. It helps to keep the I-self relationship open — and so rescues it. But this opening-up does not occur without anxiety, suffering, and other inner turmoil. Without this power the I-self relationship would be passive and would end in an empty mimetic circle in which I and self mirror one another.¹⁶ In the end I and self would coalesce and become a purely 'negative unit' as Anti-Climacus calls it.¹⁷ Put differently: if becoming a self consists of the interiorizing of truth, the I-self relation, with all its doubt, fear, desperateness, and pride, must deepen and transform spiritually into an existence that is attuned to a power outside itself (Verstrynge 1997). *Sickness unto Death* and other works are one lengthy attempt

¹⁵ For an illuminating introduction into the notions of self, truth, and subjectivity, see Evans (2009, chapter 3).

¹⁶ This is my — slightly anachronistic — summary of what the pseudonymous authors indicate with terms like despair, anxiety, absent-mindedness, and so on

¹⁷ Here we encounter a basic difference with Hegel's thought, especially his analysis of the dialectic of *Anerkennung* (recognition). In the recognition of the other (= that which consciousness has outside itself) consciousness performs an *Aufhebung* (negation) of the otherness of the other. This *Aufhebung* is made possible through recognition; it is recognizing that the other is another consciousness, which consciousness encounters within itself (hence the reference to a doubling of consciousness). Next, this other consciousness is interpreted as my consciousness of the other consciousness; consciousness, therefore, recognizes itself in consciousness of the other (identification). In Kierkegaard's thought no such identification can obtain. The Hegelian doubling turns into ambiguity and, ultimately, into a paradox in Kierkegaard (see also Taylor 2000).

to describe the varieties of self-relating in relating to this power. It is tempting to call this project an existential apologetics for religion and a life with God. However, we should keep in mind that this could only be said from a position that the pseudonymous authors don't allow themselves to have, the position of a super-author, overviewing the field. This position would be highly problematic, because it is abstract. The pseudonymous authors begin in the middle, with their distorted, desperate, fearful, doubting and demonic characters. They follow the vicissitudes of these characters, thereby only indirectly suggesting how relating to one's self-relatedness can only lead to transparency if this self-relatedness is grounded in a power outside. This 'grounding' is what we call faith, according to *Anti-Climacus* (Kierkegaard 1848/1980, SKS IV, 242).

Ultimately, deepening and inner transformation do not take shape gradually; they require a leap. *Anti-Climacus* discusses this leap in the second part of *Sickness unto Death*. Here the emphasis shifts to the 'power' rather than to the doubting individual. It is then, when anxiety and pride are receding, that new ways of self-relatedness come to the surface: guilt, demonic possession, repentance, surrender and, finally, forgiveness. Only then, it becomes clear that the subject cannot posit itself, but should attempt to clarify how self-relatedness is grounded in the power outside the self.

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Climacus describes a similar shift of perspective in order to illuminate the religious layer in the relationship of the thinker to herself. Climacus employs an ingenious thought experiment in which he reverses his starting position by assuming the thesis that subjectivity is untruth (Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 174 ff). In taking this thesis seriously one can do justice to the datum that a human being — as a 'becoming' being — must mature towards the truth and cannot begin from an ideal 'state of rectitude'. In this understanding every subject sets out in untruth. This untruth is then linked with original sin — the topic in *The Concept of Anxiety* (Kierkegaard 1844) — and from there with notions such as guilt, repentance, forgiveness, imitation, self-sacrifice and martyrdom.¹⁸

To sum up: the concepts of self and 'interiority' do not refer to a subject that posits itself. And self-relatedness is not a form of introspection or inner perception of a Cartesian solipsistic subject. Kierkegaard's self is a relational subject that in the relationship to itself simultaneously relates to others and to God. This self does not posit itself, but it is grounded in a power outside itself, in God, who sustains, opens and shapes the way we relate to our self-relatedness.

Let me now flesh out the significance of the thesis that truth is subjectivity in terms of the notions of objectivity, system, and world history.

Objectivity

Why draws Kierkegaard such a strong contrast between objectivity and subjectivity (see Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 101-103, 160-170)? One answer is that the objectifying approach never will lead to absolute knowledge,

¹⁸ For Kierkegaard on suffering, imitation and martyrdom, see Vos (2002).

but only to an approximation of it. However, if there be truth it must be absolute, according to Climacus. Objectifying approaches to the cosmos and to history are, by definition, approximations. They never picture the totality. Climacus compares the attempt of objectifying the totality (of meaning) with pantheism. The pantheistic position assumes a cosmos in which the eternal God is everything in everything, at every moment (Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 100-103). Such pantheism cannot be the starting-point for thought. For, the human condition is utterly historical. The absoluteness of truth can only become real from the standpoint of subjectivity. In objectifying thought absolute truth is at best a conceivable possibility (or: hypothesis). In actual thinking such truth never will become reality (or: actuality).

Here I interrupt the argument. Is Climacus not exaggerating here? Is it true that truth is absolute? And is it true that the objectifying approach ‘forgets’ the subject? Does Climacus not give a highly idealized and absolutized version of theoretical thought as aiming at pure and completely detached objectivity?¹⁹ However legitimate such criticisms are, for Climacus they seem to lack relevance. Concerning abstract thought he says for instance, that it assumes a completed truth and thus an ideal identity of thought and being.²⁰ From this ideal identity there is no way back to the subject, because going that way would imply concretization, application in the here and now. Such concretization would mean that the ideal identity is exposed to the becoming (changing) character of temporal being. In becoming there can be no identity of thought and being (Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 157-160). God alone, in his actuality, has such identity of thought and being. Hence, in abstract thought that which *par excellence* can never be entirely abstract, must necessarily remain abstract: the subjective thinker herself.

¹⁹ I follow this line of questioning a little further, in order to highlight its relevance for today. Is the method of abstraction not just temporarily at work and are ‘method’ and objectification not put aside when scientific results are applied to the everyday world? And, the other way around, is theoretical thought not always bound to a certain measure of subjectivity — for instance, as a result of the fact that theorizing always occurs in a particular context? Is Climacus not neglecting the more daily practices of objectification — for instance in the use of instruments (machines, tools) — which do not exclude subject participation, but presuppose it? Recent approaches in philosophy of neuroscience suggests that our cognitive acts are embodied, embedded and enacted. These approaches suggest more naturalistic and pragmatic ways of combining the subjective and objective perspective. Objectification is, then, neither a special act of detached inner representation, nor an equally detached externalization of such representations in, for instance, models, schemes, and algorithms. Subjectivity comes along with the embodiment of our acts, even highly sophisticated cognitive ones. See for instance Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1993) and Thompson (2007).

²⁰ Later (Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 269) Climacus will make a distinction between pure thought and abstract thought. Pure thought tries — in vain — to cut off every tie to the subject; abstract thought does have some distant awareness of a subject. Of pure thought Climacus then says that it is a phantom of abstract thinking that is by nature not interested in the subject. I say this in order to highlight that close-reading of the text highlights subtleties that cannot be done justice to in this article.

System

Climacus emphasizes, as we have seen, that the subjective and objective approach cannot be chosen simultaneously and can therefore never simultaneously be true. This brings us to the notion of the system (see Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 88-103). When Kierkegaard speaks about a system, he often means Hegel, who, according to Kierkegaard, tried to think together the subjective and the objective as simultaneous. For this thinking together, the concept of mediation is central. Mediation refers to the attempt to join the subjective and the objective in the present. Mediation is annulment and conservation at once, in German indicated with the term *Aufhebung* (synthesis at a higher level) (Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 186). It is annulment because the original elements are transformed into something new, and therefore do not exist anymore. It is conservation, because the content of the elements is preserved in the new synthesis.

Kierkegaard comments on this extensively. His main point is that such mediation remains by definition abstract, because it takes place in thought. Thinking together the subjective and the objective, trying to adjust (and even reconcile) the existing individual as subject and truth (or the idea of God) as the object, — this will always continue to be a matter of arguing and constructing, in thought. In such thinking, the subject by definition turns into something accidental, into a function within the system, something that essentially makes no difference and is doomed to disappear, according to Climacus. The system is in essence indifferent; it wipes out all differences. Climacus thinks contrary about being-human. Being human should be defined in terms of difference, even in an intensified form, as paradox.²¹

Man comes closest to this simultaneity of subjectivity and objectivity in passion. Passion is paradoxical in that it keeps a secret. The secret is what escapes, because of its transcendence. The secret is an 'over-against' that never can be objectified, or, caught in our schemes. The Christian reader, of course, thinks here of the person of Jesus Christ. Christ is the object of faith, He escapes from our conceptual schemes and transforms our subjectivity. In the more technical language of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, it is precisely because of the fact that the 'over against' of thought (and faith) offers resistance against conceptual appropriation that it keeps to exert influence on the I-self relationship. Viewed from this perspective, truth can be radically subjective and yet the subject need not be swamped by subjectivism. It is the dynamic exerted by the 'over against' that prevents solipsism. Resistance to this power, however, can end in isolation, despair, and solipsism.

²¹ To compare Hegel and Kierkegaard is extraordinarily interesting, and I consider it crucial to the understanding of existential phenomenology, deconstructivism, and the debate on the nature and future of Christian philosophy; for examples, see Berthold-Bond (1998), Liehu (1990), Taylor (2000).

World history

Through all of this glimmers a philosophy of time which brings us to the third moment that needs to be addressed: world history (see Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 108-136). Like the idea of system the idea of world history presupposes the totality. As expected, Kierkegaard objects to the view that the thinker is able to think history as totality. Such thinking, again, forgets itself and such forgetting is existentially impossible.²² In the reconstruction of world history the thinker cannot escape from adopting a certain perspective. The world-historical thinker rows against the stream of this historical perspective. The question is whether this can be done. Climacus holds that such detachment and rising above one's historical perspective is impossible, not so much due to lack of time or mental capacity, but more essentially because — in speculative form — it irrevocably leads to effacing of subjectivity. The very idea of world history itself is already bound to objectifying thought and thus can at best be approximated, which is at odds with the claim to absoluteness by world-historical thinkers like Hegel (see earlier). Put differently, by the act of abstraction the category of the real (or: actual) is reduced to the possible. Completed world history is a kind of thought experiment, bound to a theoretical attitude of thought. Such thinking remains hypothetical, it refers to a possibility and cannot reach any further than that. Such reflection remains at a distance from real life, from the 'actuality' of decisions and from ethics.

Kierkegaard's philosophy of time can be reconstructed from passages in *The Concept of Anxiety* and again in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. In these works passion, as desire for the infinite, intensifies to pathos that anticipates eternity. The eternal thus becomes a future that affirms its reality through its operation in the present. Passion is described as an 'instantaneous continuity' that 'both arrests and impels'. This difficult formulation expresses that focusing on ultimate concerns leads to both existential concentration ('arrest') and dynamics ('impel'). Concentration, or deepening of the I-self relation, does not lead to a standstill. The subject with passion is not absorbed by an eternal world full of Platonic ideas. Nor does the subject with passion disappear in a world of ethereal abstractions. This subject exists fully in time (Kierkegaard 1846/1992; SKS VII, 258-313).

This fullness is, in fact, comparable with the fullness in time that characterizes the Dooyeweerdian subject with its supratemporal heart. The instantiation is a coming into existence that puts existence into motion (compare the religious dynamic that originates in the supratemporal heart; and, ultimately, in the Origin of meaning). Kierkegaard does not use the term concentration so much, but the term actuality: the moment acquires (existential) weight, so to say, in the existential deepening of the I-self relation, which is a concentration within time. The difference with Dooyeweerd is that Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors put more emphasis on the element of reversal (or: conversion). The proper stance to truth is not at all self-evident; it requires a transformation

²² This 'forgetfulness' is characteristic for most of traditional philosophy, according to Climacus. Exceptions are, among others, Socrates and Hamann.

of our heart. Dooyeweerd speaks in this context of sin as an ‘obfuscation’ of Christian insight (as if something stands in the way of viewing the entire picture) (NCII, 572).

Socrates, Kierkegaard’s philosophical hero, came halfway here (Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 171-178). Kierkegaard’s admiration concerns the existential element in his thinking. Socrates was, in fact, the first ‘existential’ thinker, a thinker who moved beyond irony. Who would be prepared to die for the truth, other than he who holds that thinking the truth is a matter of life and death? What is relevant in this context is that we find in Socrates the idea of desire for eternity, conceived of as knowing something infinite which cannot be spoken about in positive terms.

Recognition of this desire for eternity reveals an awareness of truth that even more pronouncedly is present in Christian faith. Socrates’ weakness was to locate eternity in the past. Our deepest knowledge, according to Socrates, is knowledge via *anamnesis* (recollection of memories). In Plato this refers to the recollection of eternal Ideas. This speculative doctrine is a great temptation for the Socratic position, because it tends to wipe out subjectivity by projecting the whole of one’s existence and of history back to an eternal beginning. The extraordinary in Socrates is that — in contrast to the more speculative Plato — he remained an existential instead of a rationalistic thinker. Socrates understood that truth has an essential relationship with the existing person. He went so far as to give up his own existence in order to hold on to his convictions. This conviction was an ‘absurdity’, in the sense that it by definition could not be objectified. Immortality cannot be proven. Clinging to this absurdity is what makes Socrates so admirable. Socrates however did not get beyond this point. He remained stuck in an ultimately fruitless repetition — repetition, because the anamnesis of eternal ideas is a recurring activity that remains bound to the past, i.e., to ideals that are located in an eternal world that itself does not change anymore.

In the elaboration of his own philosophy of time Climacus takes two more steps. The first is that eternity is not behind us, but has entered time, that eternity is in time. Truth and eternity are virtually synonymous. The eternal is the future, that which lies before us. But eternity is not stored up for us like a dowry. It presents itself now, in the ‘moment’. The eternal becomes actual in the now, in the present moment. The eternal, again, primarily refers to an intensification of existence. Instead of a paradoxical ‘linkage’ between truth and subjective existence, as in Socrates, we now meet with the idea of a paradoxical identity: truth itself has become paradox, namely by entering time. Or: eternity exists in time. Climacus obviously refers to the mystery of incarnation, to Jesus Christ as Son of God become flesh. The truth is a paradox because the eternal Son of God assumed an existence in time. The truth, then, is not an ideal condition at the end of time, nor is it a heavenly or paradisiacal original condition. It is paradoxical, because eternity and time are usually seen as contrasts, whereas here they come together.

Truth, however, is paradoxical in a double sense. This is Climacus’ second point. The idea of doubling (or: duplication) of the paradox is comparable to

what earlier was described as reversal (or: conversion) in the I-self relationship, but now with emphasis not only on the historicity of the transformative moment but also on the reality of the other (Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 505-506). Up to now the issue was how the 'power' outside me becomes actual for me. This 'actuality' is paradoxical, due to the synthesis of the non-synthesizable, the eternal and the temporal, in the God-man Jesus Christ. His existence awakens a desire in me that does not come to rest. It is this unrest that causes a change, even a reversal in my existence. Faith is not only paradoxical in that it "accentuates actuality" and thereby transcends the aesthetic and metaphysical points of view (the longing for sensory immediacy and the tendency to rationalistic system building respectively). It now also becomes paradoxical in an ethical and religious sense, in so far it accentuates the actuality of another person, instead of one's own. This person is Jesus Christ, the absolute paradox.

The crucial point here is that the existence of Jesus Christ is not exhausted in his existence for me. The new paradox implies having a paradoxical relationship in our relation to the absolute paradox (Jesus Christ) (Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 489-496; see also 182-196). He, who until now could only be thought as a possibility, namely as the other who might become actual, now in fact has become reality. In Jesus Christ, the undreamt-of possibility becomes actual for me. He is the one who wants to take my place and who is my substitute.

To paraphrase this: up until now actuality was something realized in the I-self relationship. With this, the 'actual' continued to be bound to the individual. In a sense this is still the case when life is placed under the sign of eternal redemption, but it is more accurate to place the accents differently now, and to speak of a double and paradoxical dynamics: self-actualization is now borne and made possible by the decisive actuality of the other, Jesus Christ for the Christian reader, as historical reality. His existence has come true and is actual in my existence. It is no longer me seeing Him, but Him seeing me and thereby changing me.

To sum up: the thesis of the subjectivity of truth tries to highlight what it means that self-relatedness plays a role in the search for truth. We concluded that self-relatedness does not stand on its own feet, but requires a relation to a power outside itself, which establishes, sustains and calls the self. This, ultimately, requires a reversal of one's perspective: it is no longer me reaching out for a truth outside myself; it is seeing myself as always already involved in a struggle for truth; it is viewing truth as having an impact on me from the very beginning of my search for it. This fundamental involvement (and also, the denial and distortion of it) is investigated in three domains: objectivity, the system, and world history. In the discussion about objectivity, Climacus made it clear that in abstract thought there is no place for the subjective thinker. With respect to the notion of system, Climacus showed that the 'over against' of thought (the 'object' of faith) offers resistance against conceptual appropriation and that this resistance, paradoxically, helps to keep the I-self relationship open. And,

finally, with respect to world history it was pointed out that self-actualization is only possible by the decisive historical reality of the eternal God, incarnated in Jesus Christ. It is this ultimate, absurd, paradoxical reality that fills my existence, shapes my self-relatedness, and gives my life meaning.

6. *Second exploration of the reformational-philosophical position*

Is Kierkegaard's thought really far removed from that of reformational philosophers, like Zuidema suggested? To begin with, let me indicate some points of agreement.

Notable in spite of the differences in the way philosophy is practiced, is the persistent attempt to come into contact with the most fundamental dimension of meaning, what I called 'existential truth'. Dooyeweerd and Kierkegaard both insist on the significance of religion in establishing contact with truth. They impress us with the seriousness and persistence with which they seek to render this plausible. Human life can only develop and prosper when the relation to the eternal (Kierkegaard) or to the Origin, conceived as 'fullness of meaning' (Dooyeweerd), is kept open.

Kierkegaard and Dooyeweerd value, each in their own way, an approach from within. Kierkegaard's dialectical approach displays some affinity with Dooyeweerd's critique of antinomies, in this respect. Lack of transparency (Kierkegaard) indicates that self-relatedness is threatened by premature closure and insufficient openness toward the power in which the self is grounded. Similarly in Dooyeweerd: Inconsistencies and antinomies reveal that one's thought suffers from lack of openness and is guided by immanent goals that have become hypostatized. Kierkegaard's search for 'transparency' or 'transparency in being grounded in a power' seems an existential version of the search for directedness at the Origin and for the opening-up of law spheres, analogies, and object functions. Lack of transparency is more than just a cognitive reality. Accordingly, for Dooyeweerd, antinomies are far more than just logical categories.

Significant is also the focus on the I-self relationship and the convergence between the concepts of concentration (Dooyeweerd) and actuality (or intensification) (Kierkegaard) — concepts that apply to the I-self relationship. In Kierkegaard actuality (intensity) comes to expression in pathos which, as we saw, is both an arrest (concentration) and an impulse towards motion (dynamics). In Dooyeweerd, religious concentration occurs when the self, with all its functions, opens itself for the Origin of meaning and lets itself become 'dynamized' by the fullness of meaning that has been revealed by God in Christ.

Interesting, finally, is also the affinity between both thinkers regarding the theme of 'doubling'. Dooyeweerd has been reproached that certain modal concepts, such as love, trust, and communion, are also used to indicate what is going on in the transcendental (supratemporal, central-religious) sphere. Terms like love, trust and communion are used both in a modal and in a (religious-) transcendental sense and this duplication of terminology has been

interpreted as weakness. Either Dooyeweerd's philosophy would run the risk of a form of anthropomorphism, for instance with respect to how God acts in human lives (in love, trust, and communion); or this philosophy would be unclear about the status of religious terms used in a transcendental context.

Instead of solving the issue, let us take a step back and make clear how Dooyeweerd and Kierkegaard address a similar problem here; the problem of how to philosophically conceive the truth of divine presence and the influence of this presence in the world, most notably in the lives of thinkers who by themselves are not inclined to surrender to a forgiving God and to open-up to divine transcendence.

Dooyeweerd is convinced of the reality of the religious dynamics exerted by God as Creator and by Christ as exemplification of fullness of meaning, even in theoretical thought. As philosopher he is looking for a conceptual framework to do justice to this dynamics. However, he also insists that the central-religious sphere escapes theoretical conceptualization. Whatever is formulated about it, it will never have the status of a theory. At the same time, this does not mean that nothing can be said about it. The Christian philosopher, convinced of the realities revealed in the Scriptures, can use metaphor and philosophical intuition. This may sometimes lead to what appears, but is not really, a duplication of terminology. Dooyeweerd's systematic philosophy not only attempts to exemplify the required openness for transcendence, but also tries to come as closely as possible to the expression of the fullness and dynamics of meaning that religiously is intuited and has been revealed in the Scriptures. This occurs for instance when 'central' (religious, supratemporal) love is connected with 'modal' love, which regulates our functioning in the moral mode. The duplicity of the term love results from Dooyeweerd's conceptual armamentarium, which makes a distinction between the modal and supramodal ('central-religious') sphere. What Dooyeweerd has in mind is that moral relations between people have a spiritual dimension with a religious (and, therefore, even more encompassing and deeper) meaning. Think, for instance, of the spiritual meaning of marriage.

In Kierkegaard's thought we also meet duplication, though of different sort, namely as a dialectical instant just prior to the transition or leap. I limit myself to the example at the end of the previous section, where the absolute paradox doubled such that it no longer indicated the actuality of my life, but simultaneously the actuality of an existence outside of me, the other who becomes my substitute, and who, thereby, saves me.

The double use of central terms, in other words, especially arises where attempts are made to get as closely as possible to the nitty-gritty of the religious dynamics in human existence and in history. Duplication of terminology comes forward in the attitude of religious concentration, when the 'divine mystery' of things is inquired.²³ This 'concentration' is at the same time a deepening of

²³ These considerations are also relevant for the interpretation of M.C. Smit's philosophy of history, with its distinction between of first and second history. For the second (transcendental) history a language is needed that is as intuitive and probing as Dooyeweerd's language for the supratemporal sphere. See Smit (1987, 96-117).

insight and a ‘deepening of the I-self relationship’. The thinker himself — and this is Kierkegaard’s addition to Dooyeweerd — appears to be transformed by the very act of concentration on a certain subject, of putting it in the light of fullness of meaning (which entails: redemption). This change of attitude may lead to the uncovering of new perspectives but also to deeper understanding of the ambiguity and brokenness of our existence.

It is my impression that — notwithstanding all the differences in approach and style — there is also here an essential area of agreement between Dooyeweerd and Kierkegaard. From a Kierkegaardian point of view the doubling of some terms in Dooyeweerd’s work can be interpreted positively, namely as readiness for other, richer meanings; as recognition of a spiritual component in ordinary phenomena; and even as announcement of the possible disclosure of a new position from where philosophizing is possible. Only, Kierkegaard moves on from here. His thinking itself witnesses to the ambiguity and conflict that according to him is characteristic for such concentration. Seen in this way, reformational-philosophical thinking, with its emphasis on the goodness of creation and sin as only ‘obfuscation’ of one’s view (see earlier), is somewhat naive in its view on the growth of understanding and tends too much to smooth out the hurdles — the suffering, anxiety and doubt that come along with one’s ‘conversion’.

This is the moment to consider Zuidema’s criticism of Kierkegaard. On the one hand Zuidema sees a Kierkegaard who pushes the thinker to the point of choice. This Kierkegaard is a proto-existentialist who understands freedom as inner act that seeks to escape from fear, hopelessness, and, in general, an existence that circles around itself. In the religious Kierkegaard the relation to the self is determined by pathos for the infinite. This pathos in turn is determined by the relation to the absolute paradox: the utterly absurd and impossible-to-mediate fact of the incarnation of the eternal God in time. Zuidema’s main point is that the philosophy of time which should weave together the two perspectives, the religious and the existential perspective, is wrong. Kierkegaard’s theory of the moment as ‘synthesis’ of the finite and the infinite, of the temporal and the eternal, is a ‘mystifying’, ‘romantic’ and ‘dialectical’ construction that “relegates the history of salvation to a place outside of the actual history of salvation and, also, outside of given cosmic relationships.” Zuidema’s stern judgement is that this mystification made Kierkegaard’s philosophy vulnerable for the later misuse of it on the part of existentialists and dialectical theologians. All they needed to do was to strip Kierkegaard’s philosophy of its theory of time. Next the existentialist thinkers could run off with the Kierkegaard of fear, despair, and the I-self relation, and the dialectical theologians could capitalize on the idea of divine action as absolute paradox (Zuidema 1953, 40-41, 54-55, 59).

It seems to me that this criticism is unnecessarily harsh.²⁴ To be sure, questions can be asked concerning Kierkegaard’s views on time, creation and

²⁴ For example, Zuidema dubs Kierkegaard’s notion of history, and especially his view of God’s entering into time as a ‘pseudo-theogony’. This is a needlessly severe judgement of a thinker who would be a Christian first of all.

history. Let us not forget, however, that for the reformational philosopher creation, the supratemporality of the heart, and divine acts are also limiting concepts for theoretical thought. They refer to a reality that primarily issues an appeal to faith. Moreover, and more specifically, Zuidema one-sidedly emphasizes a specific interpretation of Kierkegaard's actualism by interpreting the 'moment' as 'atom of eternity'. The term is Kierkegaard's own, but is compensated in other passages by notions like 'repetition' and 'passion'. Passion, we saw, refers, via the notion of 'impulse' to being put into motion and to continuity.²⁵ Zuidema also neglects passages, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, *Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity* for instance, where concerning the thesis of the truth as subjectivity it is stated that this does not exclude the idea of divine providence and of a divine world plan (Kierkegaard 1846/1992, SKS VII, 114, 131; 1848/1980, SKS IV, 153-156; 1848/1991, XII, 176-178). Kierkegaard's point is first of all that man is never in a position to look over God's shoulder. With this Dooyeweerd and other Reformational philosophers would agree.

There are differences in style, emphasis and conceptual 'framing' between Kierkegaard and Dooyeweerd, but there are also similar concerns and philosophical intuitions, more even than have been acknowledged so far in the literature. Kierkegaardian thinking is moreover helpful in raising awareness of the tensions, ambiguities, and brokenness of our existence, even in the search for truth.

7. Conclusion

Kierkegaard's thought alerts the reformational philosopher to the delicate character of the relation between the thinker and the truth. All too easily a disparity occurs between truth and the way the thinker relates to the truth. Such disparity comes to expression in a lack of transparency in the I-self relationship. Lack of transparency acts as warning sign in this context — as a warning in the existential sphere, just like inconsistency serves as alert in the logical sphere. Lack of transparency is an aid in the attempt to unmask false pretensions in philosophy, theology and metaphysics. In the Kierkegaard reception within reformational philosophy this may have been an underestimated point. The way Kierkegaard capitalizes on the notion of self-relatedness and its many manifestations may serve as source of inspiration for rethinking concepts such as heart, self-relatedness, and religion (Glas 2006a; 2006b; 2010).

Truth requires a proper way of self-relating to gain access to it. Seen from this perspective, usual conceptualizations of the relation between worldview and philosophy might appear to be overly simplistic.²⁶ By dissecting different

²⁵ This does not mean that no further questions can be posed regarding Climacus's understanding of history and his view of the words and deeds of Jesus. For this theme see Evans (1992, 143-169); and more generally Doedens (1999) and Gouwens (1996).

²⁶ In reformational philosophy worldviews are usually seen as (cognitive-affective-dispositional) embodiments of one's view on ultimate concerns; whereas philosophy is considered as a straight-forward theoretical activity directed at boundary questions. Dooyeweerd has

types of self-relatedness it is possible to gain a more refined and richer understanding of what it is to be a Christian thinker.

On the other hand, Kierkegaardian approaches might profit from insights developed in reformational philosophy, especially from the systematic framework that has been developed, with its distinctions between different law spheres, between law and subject, between modal and individual types of analysis, and the intrinsic connection between ‘structure’ and ‘direction’. One of the next projects for Christian philosophy could be to construe a typology of ways of self-relatedness with help of the systematic distinctions developed within reformational philosophy.

Questions can be raised about Kierkegaard’s notions of creation and history. Does Kierkegaard have room for the idea that we belong to creation and are part of history (and not only relate to it; this was Zuidema’s point)? Does reconciliation in Kierkegaard have consequences for the ‘inner reformation’ of all manner of structural relationships? And as to history: can history still be seen as something that embraces mankind and of which it is a part?

These questions are big and must remain unanswered here. This much is certain: Kierkegaard’s complex thought offers more than enough leads for a continuation of the discussion.

been quite explicit that philosophy and worldview, conceived in this way, though related, should be kept apart (NC I, 128, 158). Both are directed towards the fullness (or totality) of meaning, but in this directedness philosophy remains bound to the theoretical attitude of thought whereas worldviews develop in the fullness and immediacy of daily life (NC I, 124-128; 156-165). Since Dooyeweerd, reformational philosophy has been practiced in all variants, worldview types on the one hand and more systematic and strictly philosophical types on the other hand. Van Riessen, for instance, was a philosopher who saw more continuity between philosophy and worldview. He elaborated on the concept of wisdom and its importance for philosophy. Jacob Klapwijk (1971) used the term ‘comprehensive’ in a review of Hendrik van Riessen’s *Wijsbegeerte*, in order to contrast Van Riessen’s approach (‘method’) with the methodologically more strict approach of Dooyeweerd. See for my own position Glas (2011a), (2011b). The reader should be aware how heavily the ideal of philosophy as *strenge Wissenschaft* (‘rigorous science’ — the term is Edmund Husserl’s) still burdened philosophy departments at the early seventies of the previous century. Something of relief and liberation can be felt in a slightly later statement by Van der Hoeven (1980, 185-6): “It may be that, after all these remarks [on evil, original sin and the interpretation of Genesis 1-3], one asks: Is all of this still philosophy? My spontaneous answer would almost be: that’s not my worry. More seriously: what does worry me is that our philosophy accidentally would become estranged from sustained and attentive listening to Scripture.” The point of these remarks is that Kierkegaard’s work on the varieties of self-relatedness can offer fresh perspectives on the intricate relationship between religious faith and theoretical thinking.

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