Rob Compaijen

"*Ne Quid Nimis*." Kierkegaard and the Virtue of Temperance

Abstract: In this article I argue that—despite Kierkegaard's seemingly harsh critique of temperance—it plays a crucial role in the ethics he worked out under the pseudonym of Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity*. Anti-Climacus, following Socrates in the *Philebus*, thinks of the good life as a "mixed" life in which the different and opposed dimensions of human existence, *peras* and *apeiron*, are in due proportion. In Anti-Climacus' ethics the process of realizing the "mixed" life does not, *contra* the Socratic conception, involve reason restricting desire, but, instead, the will (infused with self-knowledge) grounding imagination in the facticity of human existence. It is through this perfectionist process that we are able to imitate Christ, which is how Anti-Climacus ultimately understands the good life. Moreover, I suggest that we could understand this form of temperance as a virtue. In the conclusion I show that Kierkegaard's seeming critique of temperance is actually a critique of mediocrity.

I Introduction

Any attempt to argue that Kierkegaard views temperance as morally praiseworthy, seems, for a number of reasons, bound to fail. First, many of his texts are morally extreme; for instance, when he writes that we constantly should keep in mind God "hates specifically that in which you naturally have your life, to which you cling with all your zest for life."[1] Secondly, Kierkegaard is, throughout his writings, particularly critical of aspects that have traditionally been associat-

This article originally appeared in Dutch as "Ne quid nimis". Kierkegaard en de deugd van de matigheid," in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, vol. 75, no. 3, 2013, pp. 455 – 485. The English translation here appears with the kind permission of this journal. I would like to thank Johan Taels, Wolter Hartog, Jonne Hoek, as well as the reviewers of *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this article, and Lauren Greenspan for helping me with the translation.

1 *SKS* 13, 227 / *M*, 177.

Rob Compaijen, Stadscampus Universiteit Antwerpen, S.D. 422, Grote Kauwenberg 18, 2000 Antwerpen, Belgium, robcompaijen@gmail.com

ed with temperance, such as prudence and curbing the passions; aspects that he regards as expressions of mediocrity. He writes, for example, that the prudent do not dare to venture in their lives and that consequently they will lose themselves.[2] Thirdly, in some texts Kierkegaard seems to explicitly criticize temperance, usually from a distinctly Christian perspective. For instance, in a journal entry he criticizes the classical adage "*ne quid nimis*" [of nothing too much]: "If this is the truth: *ne quid nimis*—then Christianity is a lie, every line of Holy Scripture is madness and confusion."[3] In the same passage he writes that "*ne quid nimis*" is the highest wisdom for pre-Christian, Greek thought, but that Christianity goes beyond it.[4] He thus seems to think about temperance when he describes the pagan virtues as "glittering vices."[5]

Kierkegaard therefore seems to put classical, Greek thought and Christian thought in opposition precisely with regard to temperance. Undoubtedly he thinks about Socrates, whom he regards as "the founder of ethics" and the most important of the Greek philosophers.[6] In Plato's dialogues temperance (*sophrosynè*) is one of the cardinal virtues. That is to say, one's life cannot possibly be considered to be good when one lacks temperance. Socrates claims that the person who is temperate or *sophron* has established order or harmony in him- or herself.[7] Realizing this harmony means establishing a right proportion of the different elements of human existence. Now, if temperance should be understood as the virtue through which we establish a right proportion of the different elements of human existence, we stumble upon something remarkable: the ethics Kierkegaard develops under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness unto Death* seems to revolve precisely around this idea, i.e. of realizing the right proportion of different elements of human existence. Temperance would, in that case, be the core of Anti-Climacus' ethics.

We have indeed stumbled upon a remarkable ambiguity in Kierkegaard's ethical thought. On the one hand he seems to repudiate temperance, whereas on the other hand he develops an ethics that seems to revolve around the idea of temperance. How should we understand this apparent contradiction? Does temperance indeed play a crucial role in Kierkegaard's ethics? But if this is the case, how should we understand his seeming critique of this virtue? Or

2 *SKS* 11, 150 / *SUD*, 34–35.
3 *SKS* 22, 157, NB12:24 / *KJN* 6, 155. See also *SKS* 7, 368 / *CUP1*, 404 and *SKS* 11, 200 / *SUD*, 81–82.
4 *SKS* 22, 157, NB12:24 / *KJN* 6, 155.
5 *SKS* 11, 161 / *SUD*, 46. *SKS* 11, 195 / *SUD*, 82.
6 *SKS* 11, 202 / *SUD*, 89.
7 Plato, *Gorgias,* trans. by Donald J. Zeyl, in *Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper, Indianapolis: Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company 1997, 504b.

is this simply an insoluble contradiction? In this article I will explore these questions. In the second section I will give a brief account of the Socratic understanding of *sophrosynè*. I will elaborate Anti-Climacus' philosophical anthropology and ethics in the third section. In the fourth section I will show that temperance indeed plays a crucial role in that ethics. The fifth section will focus on the question whether we could understand this Anti-Climacian understanding of temperance as a *virtue*. In the conclusion I will reflect on Kierkegaard's critique of temperance.

It is important to raise these questions because the role of temperance in Kierkegaard's ethical thought has not yet been thoroughly worked out. In recent years there has been a growing attention to Kierkegaard's relation to the virtue ethical tradition. Studies dealing with individual virtues such as faith, love, courage and patience are important, but, as said, temperance has not yet been elaborated upon. By asking the questions mentioned above we are able to shed new light both on Kierkegaard's ethical thought and on his relation to (and place in) the virtue ethical tradition.

II Socrates on the Good Life and Sophrosynè

Alasdair MacIntyre stresses that we can only understand what a virtue is—and what the specifics of a particular virtue are—when we also have a conception of the good life.[8] This is because virtues are the qualities or dispositions through which the good life is realized. What, then, is the good life according to Socrates? We encounter an answer to that question in, among others, the dialogue *Philebus*.

The main question of the *Philebus* is whether the good consists of pleasure or of insight. Answering this question presupposes an account of the nature of pleasure and insight. In his search for a proper understanding of pleasure and insight, Socrates develops an ontology that distinguishes being into four categories: 1) the infinite, the limitless (*apeiron*)—pleasure; 2) the finite, the limited (or that which limits) (*peras*)—insight; 3) the mixture of *apeiron* and *peras*—the mixed life; and 4) the cause of the mixture of *apeiron* and *peras*—reason.[9] Socrates claims that the good life cannot consist in pleasure or insight alone, but that it is a mixed life: a life in which both pleasure and insight have their

8 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press 2008, pp. 148–149 and pp. 187–203.

9 See Plato, *Philebus*, trans. by Dorothea Frede, in *Complete Works*, 23c-e, 27c-31a.

place and function.[10] However, in this mixed life, the elements mixed are not naturally in due proportion: "Any kind of mixture that does not in some way or other possess measure or the nature of proportion will necessarily corrupt its ingredients and most of all itself. For there would be no blending in such cases at all but really an unconnected medley, the ruin of whatever happens to be contained in it."[11]

For the realization of the good, mixed life—the life in which *peras* and *apeiron* are in due proportion—measure or temperance is of crucial importance. How should we understand this virtue according to Socrates?[12] In Plato's dialogues three essential features of this virtue are identified. The first feature consists of what we could call the prototypical meaning of *sophrosynè:* self-control or, more precisely put, control over one's desires. We come across this meaning of *sophrosynè* in dialogues in which this virtue is discussed. A very clear example is the *Gorgias* in which Socrates defends *sophrosynè* over against Callicles' measureless hedonism.[13] Moreover, in the *Republic* Socrates defines temperance as that which orders and controls our desiring nature.[14]

In order to make clear what he means by self-control, Socrates uses in the *Gorgias* as well as in the *Republic* the expression of being master of oneself.[15] This implies that something inside myself rules over another part of me. In the person that can truly be called *sophron*, the better rules over the worse, the higher over the low, the rational over the irrational.[16] Here we encounter a second essential feature of *sophrosynè:* self-control must be understood as reason controlling our desires. In Plato's dialogues reason appears as the paragon of temperance, as we have also seen in the *Philebus* in which insight—which is the activity of reason—is understood as *peras*, limited or limiting. A clear illustration of this second feature of temperance can be found in the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates describes the human being as a charioteer and a pair of winged horses.[17] In this image, the charioteer represents reason whose task it is to con-

10 *Philebus*, 21d-23b.

11 *Philebus*, 64d-e.

12 In answering this question, I am indebted to Adriaan Rademaker's excellent study of *sophrosynè* in the works of (among others) Plato. Adriaan Rademaker, *Sophrosyne and the Rhetoric of Self-Restraint: Polysemy and Persuasive Use of an Ancient Greek Value Term*, Leiden: Brill 2005.

13 *Gorgias*, 491d.

14 Plato, *Republic*, trans. by George M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve, in *Complete Works*, 430e.

15 *Gorgias*, 491d. *Republic*, 430d-431a.

16 *Republic*, 431a-c.

17 Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Complete Works*, 253c-254e.

trol the irrational parts of human nature, represented by the two horses.[18] This is a painful and even violent process in which the desires need to be curbed again and again.[19] However, this is the only way that prevents the whole from going down through inner conflict.[20]

This phrasing leads us to a third essential feature of *sophrosynè*. The human being who can truly be called *sophron* possesses according to Socrates in the *Gorgias* a certain order: "Will it be a good one if it gets to be disorganized, or if it gets to have a certain organization and order?"[21] In the *Republic*, Socrates understands that order and harmony as an inner "agreement": the temperate person is the one in whom there is an "agreement between the naturally worse and the naturally better as to which of the two is to rule…."[22] Moreover, in the *Phaedrus* Socrates claims that from that moment on the irrational part of human nature "is humble enough to follow the charioteer's warnings."[23] The person who can truly be called *sophron* is therefore not internally divided but possesses inner harmony.

This very short discussion of *sophrosynè* in a number of Platonic dialogues suffices to show that temperance is the virtue that is inextricably connected to Socrates' conception of the good, mixed life as is worked out in the *Philebus*. *Sophrosynè* is the quality of the mixed life in which a due proportion of *peras* and *apeiron* is realized. This due proportion is formed when our (temperate) reason manages to control our (immoderate) desires.

III Anti-Climacus' Ethics and Philosophical Anthropology

Now that we have seen how Socrates understands *sophrosynè*, I will turn to Anti-Climacus' ethics. In this section I will provide an account of his ethics by working out his conception of the good life and his philosophical anthropology.

18 One of the horses refers to *thumos* (passion or will) and the other to *epithumia* (desire or appetite).
19 *Phaedrus*, 254e.
20 *Phaedrus*, 246b, 253d-254a.
21 *Gorgias*, 504b.
22 *Republic*, 432a.
23 *Phaedrus*, 254e.

A Anti-Climacus' Philosophical Anthropology

What does it mean to be human? This is one of the central questions of Kierkegaard's writings. Almost all of his philosophical and theological works explore and answer this question. Despite the complex and multifaceted character of his *oeuvre*, his philosophical anthropology is remarkably consistent. One of its characteristics is that human existence should be understood as a relation of opposite aspects or dimensions. Kierkegaard describes human existence in *Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est* as a relation of reality and ideality[24] and in *The Concept of Anxiety*, under the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis, as a relation of body and soul.[25] In *The Sickness unto Death*, Anti-Climacus uses different pairs of concepts to describe human existence. Being human means being a relation of the temporal and the eternal, of necessity and possibility, finitude and infinitude.[26] *The Sickness unto Death* contains Kierkegaard's philosophical anthropology in its most elaborated form, which is why I will focus mainly on this book. However, *Practice in Christianity*—the other book Kierkegaard published under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus—will also prove to be important for my argument.

Anti-Climacus writes, in *The Sickness unto Death*, in a famous and complex passage:

> A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis.... Such a relation that relates itself to itself, a self, must either have established itself or have been established by another. If the relation that relates itself to itself has been established by another, then the relation is indeed the third, but this relation, the third, is yet again a relation and relates itself to that which established the entire relation.[27]

This philosophical anthropological scheme, describing human existence as the self-conscious relation of two opposite dimensions, refers to "another" that has established the human being. Later it becomes clear that this "another" is God, who has created human beings.[28] The question of how to conceive of the

24 *SKS* 15, 55 / *JC*, 251.
25 *SKS* 4, 349 / *CA*, 43. *SKS* 4, 354 / *CA*, 49.
26 *SKS* 11, 129 / *SUD*, 13.
27 Ibid.
28 Cf. *SKS* 11, 132 / *SUD*, 15–16.

relation between human being and God will become important at a later stage of my argumentation (Section V). At this moment it is important to see that Anti-Climacus understands human existence as a self-reflective relation of opposite dimensions. These dimensions are described in different ways so as to highlight different aspects of human existence. He is especially interested in the pairs "possibility–necessity" and "infinitude–finitude." Interestingly, he describes this last pair as "*peras–apeiron*"![29]

Anti-Climacus develops an ethics on the basis of this philosophical anthropology. He explores not only the factual structures of human life, but he also develops a normative view on human existence. That is, he aims to establish a view on human existence as it should be and as it should not be. The latter is described as a despairing existence. "Despair" is, for Anti-Climacus (and for Kierkegaard in general), an ontological and phenomenological concept that refers to a misrelation in the self and the experience of this misrelation, respectively. When in despair, the human being suffers, in his or her existence, from a *lack* of one of the dimensions and *too much* of the other: he or she might, for instance, have focused too much on his or her finitude and therefore have neglected his or her infinitude.[30] It is important to see that both dimensions of human existence are not naturally in due proportion, precisely because human beings are relations that relate to themselves. The human being is a "self"—that is, relates to him- or herself—and this implies according to Anti-Climacus that one is free to give shape to the relation of *peras* and *apeiron* that one is.[31] This gives us a first impression of the ethics he develops in *The Sickness unto Death:* human beings should realize a proper relation between both dimensions of their existence.[32] Anti-Climacus' ethics therefore centers on the idea of striving for the realization of the ideal of the mixed life in which *peras* and *apeiron* are in due proportion. But what does that mean concretely?

Before answering that question, I would like to point out that, at this point, another question could arise, namely: are we able to realize this ideal of the

29 *SKS* 11, 151 / *SUD*, 35. Because of his interest in classical philosophy, Kierkegaard was familiar with the Pythagorean, Platonic and Aristotelian backgrounds of this pair of concepts. He seems to have read about it in Wilhelm G. Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vols. 1–12, Leipzig: Johann Ambrosium Barth 1798–1819. Next to this reference in *The Sickness unto Death* there are also references to *peras* and *apeiron* in his journals. See *SKS* 19, 384, Not13:4 / *KJN* 3, 382 and *SKS* 19, 425 f., Not14:1 / *KJN* 3, 423 f.

30 *SKS* 11, 146–157 / *SUD*, 30–42.

31 Cf. *SKS* 11, 132 / *SUD*, 16.

32 *SKS* 11, 146 / *SUD*, 29. See also *SKS* 11, 149 / *SUD*, 33.

mixed life?[33] In this article I do not have space to answer this question in an extensive and nuanced way.[34] For my argument it is important to see that Anti-Climacus stresses the *striving* towards the realization of this moral ideal, a striving that should be understood as development or "process."[35] It is, in other words, clear that, in Anti-Climacus' view, we are (at least) able to *more and more* realize a proper relation between *peras* and *apeiron*.[36]

As for Socrates, *peras* and *apeiron* have for Anti-Climacus meaning on two levels. On the *first* level, the pair "*peras–apeiron*" refers to the dimensions that he describes as "finitude–infinitude" and "limited–limitless." These different terms express in different ways the same fundamental idea: human beings are not just what they *factually are*, but also who they *could be*. Put more concretely, I am born in these times and this culture, in this family, with this particular body, these flaws and capacities, and these aspects determine the limits of my existence; not—it is crucial to see—in any deterministic sense, as if I coincide with these limits, but they are, instead, the borders within which I can develop and form myself.

On the *second* level Anti-Climacus, just like Socrates, connects *peras* and *apeiron* to specifically human capacities. *Apeiron* is connected primarily to what he describes as the human capacity "*instar omnium*": our imagination.[37] He writes that "imagination is the medium for the process of infinitizing."[38] Imagination has, by definition, a limitless character, as it is the capacity by which we are able to transcend all factual limitations. This point is most obvious in Anti-Climacus' treatment of what he regards as the primary function of the imagination: the creation of ideals towards which human beings can strive.[39] This not only shows that the imagination is the primary example of the *apeiron* of human existence; but all other human capacities seem, on Anti-Climacus' view, to be expressions of *apeiron* as well. The expression "*instar omnium*" means both "applicable to all" and "pre-eminently." He therefore views our

33 For an article that focuses on this question, see Karl Verstrynge, "The Perfection of the Kierkegaardian Self in Regulative Perspective," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2004, pp. 473–495.

34 For a more elaborate treatment of this subject, see Rob Compaijen, "Authenticity and Imitation: On the Role of Moral Exemplarity in Anti-Climacus' Ethics," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2011, pp. 341–363.

35 *SKS* 11, 170 / *SUD*, 55. See also *SKS* 11, 146 / *SUD*, 30.

36 See also Karl Verstrynge, "The Perfection of the Kierkegaardian Self in Regulative Perspective," pp. 490–493.

37 *SKS* 11, 147 / *SUD*, 31.

38 *SKS* 11, 147 / *SUD*, 30.

39 *SKS* 11, 147 / *SUD*, 31.

imagination as the most important human capacity that also determines the character of the other human capacities. Feeling or desire, knowing or reason and the will are ultimately all determined by our imagination and can, for that reason, become "fantastic" or *apeiron*.[40] This means, therefore, that, according to Anti-Climacus and in contrast to Socrates' view, none of the human capacities are limited or *peras* out of themselves!

When we combine the meanings of *peras* and *apeiron* on both levels, it becomes clear that Anti-Climacus' ethics is an ethics of becoming oneself. Realizing a proper relation of *peras* and *apeiron* is becoming oneself.[41] In this ethics we can distinguish three "moments": first, properly relating to the *peras* or facticity of my existence, which means, more concretely, that I accept my existence with all of its factually determined aspects (such as were mentioned above). Anti-Climacus writes that we then take responsibility for our actual selves with their difficulties and advantages.[42] Secondly, properly relating to the *apeiron* or infinitude of my existence means, more concretely, that I continually form or perfect my existence by striving towards ideals provided by my imagination. Thirdly, combining both these "moments" means, more concretely, that I am continuously striving for an ideal self that is in line with the facticity of my existence.[43] Although this account of Anti-Climacus' account of a proper relation of *peras* and *apeiron* has now been made more tangible, it is still rather abstract. I will make it more concrete, but in order to do that I will first have to dwell on the human capacities that are so pivotal to Anti-Climacus' ethics.

B Imagination, Will, and Reason

As we have seen, the imagination is a crucial capacity in Anti-Climacus' philosophical anthropology and ethics. In the literature on Kierkegaard this has been recognized as well. For example, David Gouwens,[44] Jamie Ferreira,[45] and Patrick Stokes[46] pay extensive attention to the role of this capacity in Kierke-

40 *SKS* 11, 147 f. / *SUD*, 31 f.
41 *SKS* 11, 146 / *SUD*, 30. See also *SKS* 11, 151 / *SUD*, 35.
42 *SKS* 11, 170 / *SUD*, 55.
43 *SKS* 11, 146 / *SUD*, 30. *SKS* 11, 149 / *SUD*, 33. *SKS* 11, 151 / *SUD*, 35 f.
44 David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of the Imagination*, New York: Peter Lang 1989.
45 M. Jamie Ferreira, *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1991.
46 Patrick Stokes, *Kierkegaard's Mirrors: Interest, Self, and Moral Vision*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan 2010.

gaard's thought. Stokes remarks in his excellent study on Kierkegaard's moral psychology that the paradoxical task assigned to human beings by Anti-Climacus consists in transcending, through our imagination, the limits of our actual existence, while at the same time connecting ourselves to these limits.[47] In one's life, one should let oneself be guided by an imagined ideal self that is both a genuine *ideal* and one's ideal *self*. This implies that one's imagination continually needs to be taken back and connected to the concrete, actual situation of one's existence. Now, Stokes states that the problem with this task is that our imagination *itself* is not capable of doing this.[48] If the imagination is the capacity by which we transcend what is factually given, how can it then, at the same time, remain connected to what is factually given?

Given the paradoxical character of this task it is interesting that Anti-Climacus writes that, when one's existence has become "fantastic," one is *responsible* for having brought about this state: "The entire self can eventually become that [fantastic], whether in the more active form of plunging headlong into fantasy or in the more passive form of being carried away, but in both cases the person is responsible."[49] That one is responsible for a misrelation in oneself implies that this misrelation is apparently grounded in an act of will—an act of will in which one does not "submit to the necessity in one's life, to what may be called one's limitations."[50] Not one's imagination, but one's will seems to be therefore the decisive capacity with regard to the imagination's functioning.

At this point we are confronted with a strong ambiguity in Anti-Climacus' thought. We discover two views in his thought: a view, as worked out in Section III, A, that regards the imagination as the fundamental human capacity, and a view that regards the will as the fundamental human capacity. Without attempting to ignore this tension, I think it is defensible to consider the second view as more important. First, Anti-Climacus understands the self primarily from the perspective of the will: "...the more will, the more self. A person who has no will at all is not a self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he has also."[51] This, it should be noted, is also the reason why he describes the different forms that the misrelation in the self can take as expressions of not *willing* to be itself. Secondly, in *Practice in Christianity* Anti-Climacus writes, precisely on the relation of imagination and will: "Every human being possesses to a higher or lower degree a capability called the power of the imagination, a

47 Ibid., p. 74.
48 Ibid., pp. 78 – 80.
49 *SKS* 11, 148 / *SUD*, 32.
50 *SKS* 11, 152 / *SUD*, 36.
51 *SKS* 11, 145 / *SUD*, 29.

power that is the first condition for what becomes of a person, for will is the second and in the ultimate sense the decisive condition."[52] There are, therefore, good reasons to conclude that Anti-Climacus regards the will as the most fundamental human capacity.

Because the will is the primary human capacity, it is the will that has to ground the imagination in the actuality of one's existence. This "being grounded in one's actuality" means concretely, as we saw, that one's imagination does not lead one away from oneself, but that it shows us an image of our ideal *self*. Thus, for this foundation of one's imagination an act of will is necessary. But now that we have solved the problem of grounding the imagination, we are confronted with a new problem: does not this account of the relation between will and imagination imply an existentialist view on the will in which the will's decisions are wholly sovereign and (thus) arbitrary? That would be deeply problematic, because a will that is not "informed" by reason is blind. That is to say: such an arbitrary, irrational will would not even know whether it has grounded one's imagination in the *actuality* of one's existence.

Does Anti-Climacus defend such an existentialist conception of the will? In the literature on this subject we encounter two opposing views. The first can be found in the work of, among others, Stokes. He stresses that the existentialist conception of the will, as described above, is indeed deeply problematic. For that reason he aims to detach Anti-Climacus (and Kierkegaard in general) from an "...existentialist account of agency whereby a totally free, unfettered, irrational will periodically intrudes upon the rational and reflective activity of mind, and it is this will that constitutes the true *self*."[53] In order to do this, Stokes denies that the will is the most fundamental human capacity and holds on to Anti-Climacus' claim that the imagination is the capacity *instar omnium*. However, precisely by holding on to the imagination as the capacity *instar omnium*, Stokes is unable to clarify how, first, the imagination can be grounded in the actuality of existence; and secondly, why human beings who do not ground their imagination in the actuality of their existence are morally culpable.[54] Against Stokes' position, then, important objections can be brought forward. Is the second position stronger?

We encounter the second position in the work of, among others, Alasdair MacIntyre. He argues that Kierkegaard does advocate an irrational and arbitrary will: "If...we were to spell out in full Kierkegaard's doctrine of the will, we would

52 *SKS* 12, 186 / *PC*, 186.

53 Stokes, *Kierkegaard's Mirrors*, p. 85.

54 See the section "Willing to see" in Stokes, *Kierkegaard's Mirrors*, pp. 130 – 133.

find that it leaves open no possibility of those relationships between desire, reason, and will which for Aristotle and Aquinas constitute rational choice."[55] For Kierkegaard the will is, according to MacIntyre, a sovereign capacity that chooses arbitrarily.[56] We seem to have reason to agree with MacIntyre, for instance when Anti-Climacus argues that the will can stop or go against reason.[57] However—and this is an important point—it does of course not follow that acts of will are by definition irrational and arbitrary! That the will is the capacity that can go against the insights of reason does obviously not mean that it cannot choose on the basis of rational insight. Indeed, this is precisely the conception of the will that emerges in our discussion. Anti-Climacus states that *self-knowledge* is necessary for grounding one's imagination in the actuality of one's existence: "Even in seeing one*self in* a mirror it is necessary to recognize oneself, for if one does not, one does not see one*self* but only a human being."[58] Without self-knowledge, then, the will does not "know" what it needs to connect the imagination to. That is not to say that the will is restricted or bound to reason, but it does mean that without self-knowledge the will could, in this case, not make the *right* decision. Self-knowledge is therefore a *necessary* condition for a proper relation of the *peras* and *apeiron* of our existence. It is, however, not a *sufficient* condition for a proper relation, as Kierkegaard makes clear in *Either/Or:* it was David's *unwillingness*, not his lack of self-knowledge, that prevented him from understanding that Nathan's parable was about him.[59]

We should conclude, then, that Stokes does not do justice to the radical and primary character of the will in Anti-Climacus' thought, whereas MacIntyre, with his depiction of a necessarily irrational will, creates a caricature of Anti-Climacus' conception of the will. In this discussion the will has come forward as the primary human capacity, but this primacy does not exclude the possibility of reason informing the will.

55 Alasdair MacIntyre, "Once More on Kierkegaard," in *Kierkgaard After MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative, and Virtue*, ed. by John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd, Chicago: Open Court 2001, p. 355.
56 Ibid., p. 354.
57 Cf. for example the section on the Socratic definition of sin: *SKS* 11, 201–208 / *SUD*, 87–96.
58 *SKS* 11, 152 / *SUD*, 37.
59 *SKS* 3, 15 / *EO2*, 5.

C The Imitation of Christ as the Good Life

As we have seen, the essential moral task in life consists, in Anti-Climacus' view, in realizing a proper relation between the *peras* and *apeiron* of one's existence. More concretely this task involves, as we have also seen, accepting the facticity of one's existence as well as striving for an ideal self that the imagination has formed on the basis of our facticity. But, as was mentioned in Section III, A, this still is a very formal description of Anti-Climacus' ethics. Can we develop a more detailed account of his ethics and determine how he views the good life?

In order to realize a proper relation between *peras* and *apeiron*, human beings should strive for an ideal. But different persons will inevitably strive for different ideals. Anti-Climacus is conscious of this obvious fact and writes about lower ideals such as being a cattleman, master and citizen,[60] and higher ideals such as being a bishop, professor and judge.[61] In this hierarchy the ideals that are harder to realize are more valuable, because they do more justice to the relational structure of human existence. However, amidst an almost endless variety of possible human ideals there is, in Anti-Climacus' view, ultimately one that is most valuable because it embodies true humanity: Christ's altruistic existence.[62] This point shows that Anti-Climacus' ethics is, ultimately, a theological ethics: he does not rationally justify his claims that *Christ* is the highest ideal for human existence and that *only* Christ embodies this ideal. However, the fact that Christ embodies the highest ideal of human existence means that the highest in human existence consists in *striving* to realize this ideal, that is: in the *imitation* of Christ. For that reason Anti-Climacus writes that "the supreme upbringing in the school of life [is]: becoming and being a Christian."[63]

In *Practice in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus illustrates what the imitation of Christ involves. In this description several elements of his ethics and philosophical anthropology, as I have discussed them up to this point, come together. He states that Christ wants to help every person in becoming him- or herself.[64] To develop that claim, Anti-Climacus tells us the story of a young man who, through his imagination, forms an image of perfection: Christ's life in humility and love.[65] This image becomes "for him his more perfect (more ideal) self."[66]

60 *SKS* 11, 193 / *SUD*, 79.
61 *SKS* 12, 98 / *PC*, 90.
62 *SKS* 11, 238 / *SUD*, 127.
63 *SKS* 12, 186 / *PC*, 186.
64 *SKS* 12, 163f. / *PC*, 160.
65 *SKS* 12, 186 / *PC*, 186.
66 *SKS* 12, 186 / *PC*, 187.

Now, this young man knows that Christ's life, through His necessary conflict with the established order, is a life of suffering, persecution and ultimately martyrdom. However, because suffering is always *actual* suffering that takes place in the actuality of existence, whereas the imagination is precisely the capacity that essentially *transcends* this actuality, the ideal image he has formed of Christ's existence attracts him.[67] More and more he transforms into the ideal that his imagination shows him. But then he discovers that his imagination has, in an important sense, deceived him. Through his self-knowledge he becomes aware of the actuality of his existence, and suddenly he realizes that his life, if it will express more and more of Christ's existence, will inevitably involve much suffering.[68] He "understands that...hope belonged to youth, he understands now that suffering cannot be avoided and that it will increase with every step he goes forward."[69] In light of the unavoidable suffering that is attached to imitate Christ in this world, it is clear that the ideal itself is not motivationally sufficient. Something else is needed: will, decision. In light of suffering one has "to *will* to be, to *will* to express the perfection (ideality) in the dailyness of actuality, to *will* it...."[70] What the young man learns, then, is that imitating Christ inevitably leads to suffering, and that the only way to proceed on that difficult road is by *willing* it, that is to say: by continually choosing not to avoid the suffering.

To summarize, we have seen that in Anti-Climacus' ethics human beings have the task of realizing a proper relation between *peras* and *apeiron*. This was shown to mean that one should fully accept the facticity of one's existence and, at the same time, strive for an ideal self that is in line with the facticity of one's existence and that one's imagination provides. As we have seen in this section, Anti-Climacus understands Christ as the eminent ideal of being human, which implies that becoming oneself should ultimately be understood as the imitation of Christ.[71] That is to say, the formation of a proper relation between *peras* and *apeiron* should in Anti-Climacus' ethics more concretely be understood as the imitation of Christ. Since we now have seen which conception of the good

67 *SKS* 12, 188 / *PC*, 189. See also *SKS* 12, 191 / *PC*, 192: "But imagination, which is the capacity for perfecting (idealizing), is essentially related to loftiness, to perfection, and is related only imperfectly to imperfection."

68 *SKS* 12, 189 / *PC*, 190.

69 *SKS* 12, 190 / *PC*, 191.

70 *SKS* 12, 189 / *PC*, 190.

71 See for this interpretation of becoming oneself as imitation of Christ: Compaijen, "Authenticity and Imitation," pp. 350 – 361.

life is implied in Anti-Climacus' views, we should be able to determine whether temperance plays a role in his ethics and, if so, how he understands it.

IV Anti-Climacian Temperance

Can we think and speak about Anti-Climacus' ethics, which culminates in a seemingly measureless and extreme life, in terms of temperance? In my discussion of *sophrosynè* in the Platonic dialogues I showed that temperance is the quality of the mixed life in which a proper relation between *peras* and *apeiron* is realized. This is in line with Anti-Climacus' ethics, which formally revolves around the same task. He writes that human beings could have a *lack* of *peras* and too much of *apeiron*, or *vice versa*.[72] Both elements should be in due proportion in order for human existence to be a rightly proportioned whole. As we have seen, we can also understand Anti-Climacus' views on the imitation of Christ in terms of a (proper) relation of *peras* and *apeiron*. This implies that we can conceive of Anti-Climacus' ethics and his conception of the extreme, seemingly measureless ideal of human existence, in terms of temperance.

Given his conception of the good life, how should we understand the temperance that seems to form the background of Anti-Climacus' ethics? I will answer this question by asking Anti-Climacus two related questions. First, what should be tempered? Secondly, what does the tempering? In answering the first question we are immediately confronted with an important difference with regard to Socrates' views on *sophrosynè*. For Socrates it is clear what should be tempered: *apeiron*, i.e., desire, which is in itself immoderate. *Peras* or reason, on the other hand, essentially *is* moderate and consequently does not need to be tempered. In strong contrast to Socrates, Anti-Climacus believes that one could suffer from an excess of *apeiron* as well as of *peras*. Human beings can be both too immersed in their imagination *and* too immersed in the facticity of their existence. Paradoxically, then, *peras* itself can be an excess in our existence. One could be (so to speak) limitlessly limited, for one could measurelessly cling to the limitations of one's existence.

Now, how should we understand this tempering of a too much of *peras* and *apeiron*? Tempering an excess of *peras* sounds paradoxical, as we have noticed. Yet this is precisely what Anti-Climacus has in mind: limitlessly limited persons "lack possibility for the relaxing and mitigating, for the tempering of necessity,

72 *SKS* 12, 146 – 151 / *SUD*, 29 – 35.

and thus lack possibility as mitigation."[73] The limitlessly limited character of this person needs to be supplemented with possibility, that is to say: with the space that is created by imagination.[74] The tempering, as Anti-Climacus himself writes, of the limitlessly limited person should thus more concretely be understood as the introduction of imagination in his or her existence. This introduction of imagination in one's existence should, however, not be at the expense of the connectedness to the limits or facticity of one's existence. Tempering an excess of *peras* should therefore *not* be taken to mean that the intensity or power of *peras* in one's existence should be tempered, but, instead, that it should be supplemented with *apeiron*.

Tempering an excess of *apeiron* in one's existence is also related to imagination. As we have seen, it is possible to lose oneself in one's imagination and become "fantastic." Tempering *apeiron* therefore concretely means that the imagination is brought back to the concrete actuality of one's existence. One's imagination is then "fuelled" by one's actuality so that it does not produce an illusion or daydream, but instead shows one's ideal *self*. It is important to see that an excess of *apeiron* does not imply that one's imagination is, in itself, too powerful and that this power should be curbed or tempered. Tempering an excess of *apeiron* means that it should be supplemented with and determined by the *peras* of one's existence, while retaining its imaginative power.

What does this mean in the context of Anti-Climacus' conception of the good life?

Although *peras* and *apeiron* are of course already opposites, they become opposites in a stronger sense when one strives towards the realization of a higher ideal. Since Christ's existence is regarded as the highest ideal one could strive for, we should conclude that both dimensions are most strongly opposed in the person imitating Christ. In such a person, the tension between *peras* and *apeiron* has risen to the highest possible level because a *maximum* of *apeiron* has to be grounded in the facticity of his or her existence.

Now that we have discussed the Anti-Climacian answer to the first question —what should be tempered?—we should turn to the second question, namely: which human capacity moderates or tempers? What mixes the *apeiron* and *peras* in one's existence? As we have seen, the ultimate ground for a misrelation in the self—the ground, that is, for our *peras* and *apeiron* being in undue proportion—is, on Anti-Climacus' view, unwillingness. Not reason, but the will, infused

73 *SKS* 12, 156 / *SUD*, 41.
74 Ibid.

with self-knowledge, turned out to be the ground for a proper relation between both dimensions of my existence.

This takes us to the core of an Anti-Climacian conception of temperance. While Socrates views *sophrosynè* as the realization of a proper relation through a tempering of the power or intensity of desire, Anti-Climacus regards tempering as the process in which one dimension is supplemented by the other. "Lack" and "excess" therefore refer not to the intensity or power of *peras* and *apeiron* in themselves, but exclusively to the proportion or ratio of these elements.[75] Only from the perspective of "the dialectic inherent in the self" can we speak meaningfully about lack and excess, for the lack of one of the dimensions should be understood as the excess of the other, and *vice versa*.[76] In Socrates' view, reason itself is temperate. For Anti-Climacus, on the other hand, *peras* and *apeiron* are not in themselves measured or limited or temperate, which is why it is impossible to determine, from their own character, when they have their ideal form. Tempering is, for Anti-Climacus, therefore no activity through which the power or intensity of *peras* and *apeiron* is curbed. On the contrary, tempering enables us to imitate Christ more and more; and because Christ embodies the highest ideal of human existence according to Anti-Climacus, we should understand tempering as the process of "mixing" dimensions that are maximally opposed.

I use the verb "mixing" here not only because Socrates speaks about the mixed life in the *Philebus*. "Mixing" refers to a classical conception of temperance as well, i.e., Cicero's "*temperantia*." Paul van Tongeren claims that Cicero, in translating the Greek "*sophrosynè*," uses several synonyms of which "*temperantia*" has become most influential.[77] He writes, "But temperance has in Latin, certainly in Cicero's Latin, the connotation of: 'the right mixture,' the right balance; *temperare* means to mix different liquids in the right proportion."[78]

In this respect, the kind of temperance that we traced in Anti-Climacus' works is in line with the classical *temperantia*. It involves the mixing of maximally opposed dimensions of human existence. The *right mixture*, the proper relation of *peras* and *apeiron*, can only be determined in light of the good life that is re-

75 There is, at this point, an interesting point of agreement with Nietzsche's thoughts on temperance. Paul van Tongeren makes clear that Nietzsche's conception of temperance revolves around the idea of realizing a due proportion of forces and is not about tempering the forces themselves. In that respect both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche distinguish themselves from traditional conceptions of temperance: "[I]n traditional morality it is not so much the plurality of and the struggle between the forces that have to be controlled, but only their strength" (Paul van Tongeren, "Nietzsche's Greek Measure," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, vol. 24, 2002, p. 20).

76 *SKS* 12, 146 / *SUD*, 30.

77 Van Tongeren, "Nietzsche's Greek Measure," p. 10.

78 Ibid.

alized through temperance. That is to say, one is more and more temperate in so far as one is more and more expressing the ideal of Christ's existence in one's concrete, actual existence.

V Temperance as a Kierkegaardian Virtue?

Up to this point I have shown that on the basis of Anti-Climacus' ethical thought, a conception of temperance can be reconstructed. My argument developed against the background of the Platonic-Socratic conception of temperance. Moreover, the kind of temperance we traced in Anti-Climacus' writings proved to be very similar to the classical notion of "*temperantia*." This raises the question whether we could understand the Anti-Climacian understanding of temperance as a *virtue*. In this section, I will explore that question. I deliberately write "explore," because a properly substantiated answer to this question needs more space than I have in this article. Nevertheless, I will make the suggestion that we can understand Anti-Climacian temperance as a virtue.

A Three Objections

Before I elaborate that suggestion, I will need to discuss three objections against my attempt to understand Anti-Climacian temperance as a virtue. The first objection, formulated by, among others, Karl Verstrynge, consists in the observation that Anti-Climacus' ethics is not a virtue ethics, but, instead, a duty ethics.[79] Anti-Climacus focuses exclusively "on categories that, within philosophical discourse, can be described as 'duty ethical'...."[80] Verstrynge also points to the relation between God and human beings in *The Sickness unto Death*. In Section III, A, I pointed out that one's relation to God is an important feature of human existence. Now, this relation to God brings with it a duty-ethical dimension that undermines any virtue-ethical account of Kierkegaard's works, because humans could never realize the kind of ideality God demands from them.[81]

79 Johan Taels and Karl Verstrynge, "Twee open brieven. Climacus en Anti-Climacus over de unieke interpretatie van Kierkegaards oeuvre," *Filosofie*, vol. 19, 2009, pp. 27–29.
80 Taels and Verstrynge, "Twee open brieven. Climacus en Anti-Climacus over de unieke interpretatie van Kierkegaards oeuvre," p. 28 (my translation).
81 Verstrynge, "The Perfection of the Kierkegaardian Self in Regulative Perspective," pp. 493–495.

Of course, virtues do not only play a role in virtue ethics. Virtues can, as Immanuel Kant shows, also be important within a deontological ethics. Moreover (and more importantly), I think we encounter, in Anti-Climacus' writings, an interesting combination of virtue-ethical and duty-ethical elements. On the one hand (and in this I agree with Verstrynge) Anti-Climacus describes becoming oneself, the realization of a proper relation between *peras* and *apeiron*, as "eternity's claim" and as "the highest claim."[82] In addition, he writes about the imitation of Christ in terms of a requirement.[83] On the other hand (and at the same time!) Anti-Climacus adopts a perspective that is focused on the formation or development of human existence, as we have seen. He describes becoming oneself as a developmental "process."[84] Furthermore, he understands the imitation of Christ as a developmental process in which one learns to express more and more of Christ's ideal life in one's own existence.[85]

Secondly, someone might object that virtues cannot play a role in Anti-Cli' writings because virtues are perfect and thus "static" character traits that are irreconcilable with Anti-Climacus' conception of human existence as fundamentally *becoming* or *striving* for perfection. However, this objection fails as well. Virtues are not perfect or completed character traits. The virtuous person is not completed, but, instead, the person that continually searches and strives for improvement.[86] And that is, as Verstrynge shows, precisely the core of human existence on Anti-Climacus' view: human beings strive for a perfection that cannot be realized perfectly and definitively.[87] The striving character of human existence therefore does not undermine a theory of the virtues but supports it.

A third objection could point to the fact that we (1) encounter the term "virtue" in Anti-Climacus' works only very infrequently; and (2) that, *when* he uses the term "virtue," it usually has a negative connotation. He writes for instance: "Very often, however, it is overlooked that the opposite of sin is by no means virtue.…No, *the opposite of sin is faith*…."[88] A Christian ethics is essentially in search of a solution for the problem of sin, and Anti-Climacus seems to reason that the solution does not consist in the cultivation of character but in faith.

---

82 *SKS* 11, 137 / *SUD*, 21f. I believe "demand" would have been a better translation of Anti-Climacus' "*Fordring*."

83 Cf. *SKS* 12, 233 / *PC*, 239. *SKS* 12, 236 / *PC*, 242.

84 *SKS* 11, 146 / *SUD*, 30. Cf. *SKS* 11, 170 / *SUD*, 55.

85 For an elaboration of that process, see *SKS* 12, 186–194 / *PC*, 186–196.

86 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 219.

87 Verstrynge, "The Perfection of the Kierkegaardian Self in Regulative Perspective," pp. 473–495.

88 *SKS* 11, 196 / *SUD*, 82.

With regard to the first point, from the fact that a concept is (almost) absent in the writings of an author we cannot, of course, conclude that the object to which the concept refers does not play an important role in that author's thought. Interestingly, David Gouwens notices that Kierkegaard uses the concept "virtue" so infrequently because he associates it with the formation of habits that limits human freedom, while it is at the same time crystal clear that a number of virtues are very important in his writings.[89] I will return to this point in the next section.

With regard to the second point, apart from the fact that, in the Christian tradition, faith itself has been understood as a virtue,[90] we have to ask how we should understand Anti-Climacus' claim that the opposite of sin is faith instead of virtue. By claiming this, he does not, in my view, reject virtue as such, but a specific conception of virtue, namely a "pagan," pre-Christian view on virtue.[91] This is clear from the context of his claims about sin and faith. The belief that sin and *virtue* are opposites, is, according to Anti-Climacus, "a pagan view" which "does not know what sin is...."[92] The pagan—a term he uses mainly to refer to the person in classical Greek culture—understands moral evil essentially as "ignorance."[93] That is, moral evil is in paganism explained by pointing to a lack of knowledge of what is really good.[94] Thus, the solution for moral evil is, in this framework, a cultivation of our desiring and reasoning nature. Against the background of such a "weak" conception of moral evil, it is quite reasonable to view "sin" and *virtue* as opposed. However, when moral evil is taken to be much more radical, this pagan view does not suffice. If it is possible, as the Christian tradition claims, that we *know* what is morally good and *yet* choose moral evil, the *pagan* view of virtue is not adequate. Anti-Climacus' critical re-

89 David J. Gouwens, *Kierkegaard as a Religous Thinker*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, p. 101.

90 In (the third part of) his book *Kierkegaard, Communication, and Virtue*, Mark Tietjen argues that Kierkegaard continues this tradition in his own original way. See Mark Tietjen, *Kierkegaard, Communication, and Virtue: Authorship as Edification*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2013.

91 I believe we have to understand Anti-Climacus' remarks on the "glittering vices" (*SKS* 11, 161 / *SUD*, 46. *SKS* 11, 195 / *SUD*, 82) in the same way. For a similar analysis see Robert C. Roberts, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and a Method of 'Virtue Ethics,'" in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, ed. by Martin J. Matuštík and Merold Westphal, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1995, p. 151.

92 *SKS* 11, 196 / *SUD*, 82.

93 *SKS* 11, 201 / *SUD*, 87.

94 *SKS* 11, 201–203 / *SUD*, 87–90.

marks thus seem to refer primarily to a specific conception of virtue rather than to virtue as such.

B Anti-Climacian Temperance as a Virtue

In our discussion of these objections several obstacles to thinking about virtues in Anti-Climacus' thought have been removed. However, removing these obstacles is, of course, not the same as establishing that virtues are in fact important in his thought, not to mention that Anti-Climacian temperance should be understood as a virtue. Nevertheless, in this section I will work out the suggestion that we can indeed understand Anti-Climacus' temperance as a virtue.

My starting point is a passage from *The Sickness unto Death* that is very important for discussions about these subjects.[95] In this passage, Anti-Climacus distinguishes between mature and childish, immediate human beings. The difference between the two is whether they possess continuity or consistency in their lives. On one occasion, childish persons act one way, and on another, they act differently again. This is the reason they continually start anew in their lives, and it is also "why they are always talking among themselves about the particular, particular good deeds, particular sins."[96] By contrast, mature human beings have an "an essential interior consistency" and aim to realize an ever richer "consistency of the good."[97] They therefore possess the (virtue-ethical) insight that, in life, it is not primarily about particular actions, but about the establishment of consistency, which he also describes as "spirit" or "totality."[98] At the same time, however, they have a fundamental fear of inconsistency: they have an "infinite fear" that making the wrong choice breaches the continuity they aim to realize and sustain.[99] Anti-Climacus writes that this continuity can be broken by the "slightest inconsistency" and in "that very moment, the spell is perhaps broken, the mysterious power that bound all his capacities in harmony is diminished."[100]

This passage suggests two things. First, we have reason to believe that virtues indeed play a role in Anti-Climacus' ethical thought: as we have seen, he acknowledges the formation and development of spirit and continuity in

95 *SKS* 11, 217–220 / *SUD*, 105–109.
96 *SKS* 11, 219 / *SUD*, 107.
97 Ibid.
98 *SKS* 11, 219 / *SUD*, 107 f.
99 *SKS* 11, 219 / *SUD*, 107.
100 Ibid.

human existence. But, secondly, this developed spirit or continuity never becomes a second nature in a decisive way, because human beings retain the radical freedom to act in ways contrary to this continuity. This is completely in line with Anti-Climacus' moral psychology, which, as we have seen, stresses the radical freedom of the will. On the basis of these insights it is possible to reconstruct the following conception of virtue: virtue is for Anti-Climacus (1) a formation, continuity or consistency in human existence, which (2) is grounded and "sustained" by the will, but which (3) the will can also pass by at any moment, and (4) in the exercise of which is constitutive of the good life.[101] Now, someone could ask: Can we call a character trait which can be passed by at any moment a virtue? Is it not essential to virtue that patterns arise which *fully* form and determine our actions? Interestingly, one of the core questions in the virtue-ethical tradition is, as MacIntyre shows, precisely the question what a virtue is.[102] This question has been answered in many different ways. In light of the conception of virtue that I have reconstructed from Anti-Climacus' works it is fascinating to note that Bonnie Kent proves that thirteenth century philosophers such as Walter of Bruges, Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus synthesize a classical conception of virtue with the idea of the radical freedom of the will.[103] These thinkers are, like Kierkegaard, reluctant about particularly one aspect of the classical, Aristotelian conception of virtue: virtue as a habit that limits our freedom to act.[104] That is why Walter of Bruges develops a view on virtue that considers the will to be the *cause* of (the development of) virtue, without thereby concluding that virtue is a disposition of the will itself.[105] Temperance, for example, he understands as constituted by the will, but he regards it as a virtue of our desiring nature.[106] Moreover, John Davenport has argued that the virtues that we en-

101 This is because, as Anti-Climacus shows, the realization of consequence or continuity *is* existing as spirit. Cf. *SKS* 11, 219 / *SUD*, 107.

102 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 181–183.

103 Bonnie Kent, *Virtues of the Will: The Transformation of Ethics in the Late Thirteenth Century*, Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press 1995, pp. 224–226 and pp. 249–254.

104 About persons who have become virtuous (or vicious) Aristotle writes for instance: "[B]ut now that they have become what they are, it is no longer possible for them to be otherwise" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. and trans. by Roger Crisp, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 47). It is fascinating that Kierkegaard discusses the relation between the Aristotelian conception of virtue and free will in a journal entry: "The voluntary act is discrete, virtue is continuous. Thus, quite profoundly, he [Aristotle] says that the voluntary act is totally within a person's power, virtue isn't, except with respect to its inception, because it is an acquired ability (continuity)" (*SKS* 19, 387, Not13:11 / *KJN* 3, 385).

105 Kent, *Virtues of the Will*, p. 228.

106 Ibid.

counter in Kierkegaard's writings are so called existential virtues.[107] The concept of an existential virtue combines the idea of character formation with the idea of radical freedom. The important Kierkegaardian notion of "repetition" expresses this clearly, Davenport argues: " 'Repetition'...names the kind of temporal pattern in which the factical hold of already-established tendencies and the transcendence of freedom are *combined:* the past is reinscribed, but in a moment of novelty."[108] That is to say, in the process of becoming virtuous persons we continue to remain free to recommit ourselves to the state of reason, feeling, desire, imagination and/or will that we have formed up to this point.[109]

This counters the objection that an emphasis on the radical freedom of the will undermines any possible conception of virtue. If we can understand virtues in Anti-Climacus' thought as worked out above, we should be able to answer the question whether we could indeed understand Anti-Climacian temperance as a virtue. Do we recognize the four aspects of virtue that we worked out in the Anti-Climacian conception of temperance? We have understood temperance from the perspective of realizing a proper relation between *peras* and *apeiron*. This is in line with the first characteristic, since we should form or develop or give continuity to the relation of *peras* and *apeiron* that we are. In line with the second characteristic we noticed, moreover, that the ground for temperance—for the mixing of both dimensions—is an act of will. In line with the third characteristic we saw that we continue to be radically free to quit or impair the process of development. As we have seen, the form that we give to ourselves can never become a second nature in a decisive way. Finally, in line with the fourth characteristic, we have seen that we are realizing the good life (which consists in the imitation of Christ) through establishing a (more and more) adequate relation of *peras* and *apeiron*. The Anti-Climacian conception of temperance that I have worked out is therefore in line with the conception of virtue that was reconstructed on the basis of *The Sickness unto Death*. In addition, Anti-Climacian temperance is interestingly similar to a classical conception of temperance, such as can be found in the writings of Walter of Bruges, because Anti-Climacus views the will as the ground of temperance, but does not consider temperance as a virtue of the will itself.

In this section I have worked out the suggestion that, first, we can reconstruct on the basis of Anti-Climacus' works his conception of virtue; and, secondly, that the temperance that forms the background of his ethical thought

107 John J. Davenport, "Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre," in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, pp. 276 – 283.

108 Ibid., p. 281.

109 Ibid., p. 280.

can be understood as such a virtue. However, it should be stressed once again that is merely a suggestion, an attempt, both too brief and provisional, to work out the virtue ethical backgrounds of Anti-Climacus' thought. This subject, and the important questions that it raises, will have to be elaborated more deeply on another occasion.

VI Conclusion: Ne Quid Nimis

In the introduction I asked whether temperance is important in Anti-Climacus' ethical thought, given his critique of this virtue. In this article I have shown that temperance is indeed important for Anti-Climacus. However, in the introduction I also raised another question, namely, if temperance is indeed important in his ethics, how then should we understand his critique of this virtue? It is this question that I will take up in the conclusion.

Kierkegaard's (and Anti-Climacus') critique of temperance is most strongly formulated in his critical reflections on the classical "*ne quid nimis*." In *The Sickness unto Death* he writes:

> The *summa summarum* of all human wisdom is this "golden" (perhaps it is more correct to say "plated") mean: *ne quid nimis*. Too little and too much spoil everything....Now and then there is a genius who goes a little way beyond this, and he is called crazy—by sensible people. But Christianity makes an enormous giant stride beyond this *ne quid nimis* into the absurd; that is where Christianity begins—and offense.[110]

Anti-Climacus' critique is, I believe, directed at two opponents. The classical formula "*ne quid nimis*" suggests that his first opponent is the classical (and therefore also Socratic) moral perspective. Ultimately, Anti-Climacus recognizes the Christian moral perspective only; that is to say, all other, merely human perspectives fail in light of the Christian perspective on the good life.[111] The Socratic perspective, for instance, fails because it is centered on a conception of the good life in which reason and desire are in due proportion. In that criticism, the Socratic conception of temperance is also discarded since it is precisely the virtue through which that life is realized. In his critique of "*ne quid nimis*" Anti-Climacus therefore does not discard temperance as such but those views on temperance that imply a merely human conception of the good life. His critique is therefore not directed at his own conception of temperance as the virtue through

110 *SKS* 11, 200 / *SUD*, 86 f.
111 Cf. *SKS* 11, 194 / *SUD*, 81.

which a proper relation of *peras* and *apeiron* (or, put differently, the imitation of Christ) is realized.

Anti-Climacus' reflections on "*ne quid nimis*" are, then, directed to the classical-philosophical understanding of temperance. However, the second (and I believe *real*) object of his critique is a different perspective: the perspective of the established order.[112] He describes this perspective in the passage quoted above as the "human wisdom" of "sensible people."[113] The prudence of the established order cries out: "Why…do you want to torture and torment yourself with the enormous criterion of ideality; turn to the established order, join the established order, here is the criterion."[114] The refusal to comply with this command will lead to being called crazy, to persecution, or, as in the case of Socrates and Christ—both of whom are gadflies that "the established order needed to keep it from falling asleep or from falling into what is even worse, self-deification."[115]—to death.

Seen from this prudent perspective of human wisdom, Christianity is absurd, offensive and immoderate. "[I]t would be best of all to explain for once that the real reason that men are offended by Christianity is that it is too high, because its goal is not man's goal, because it wants to make man into something so extraordinary that he cannot grasp the thought."[116] The extraordinary is that Christianity wants to transform humans into "image[s] of perfection."[117] In the context of *Practice in Christianity* this means, as we have seen, being an image-bearer of Christ. But this ideal of being human becomes all the more absurd, offensive and immoderate when it becomes clear that Christianity connects perfection to humiliation, suffering, persecution and possibly even martyrdom.[118] From the perspective of the prudent it is absurd to view as ideal and perfection an overstrained life that will inevitably lead to an increase of suffering.

That this Christian existence of the imitation of Christ is absurd and immoderate *from the perspective of human wisdom* again makes clear that Anti-Climacus, in his critical reflections on "*ne quid nimis*," discards a specific conception of temperance. In the confrontation between the two perspectives we encounter two radically different understandings of temperance, because we encounter two radically different understandings of the good life. The prudent conception of the

112 *SKS* 12, 99 / *PC*, 90.
113 *SKS* 11, 200 / *SUD*, 86 f.
114 *SKS* 12, 99 / *PC*, 90.
115 *SKS* 12, 97 / *PC*, 88.
116 *SKS* 11, 197 / *SUD*, 83.
117 *SKS* 12, 190 / *PC*, 191.
118 *SKS* 12, 194 f. / *PC*, 196.

good life refers, Anti-Climacus writes, to, for example, the importance of having a respected profession within the established order, which allows you to live in "a reassuring security" because you have become "like all the others."[119] In such an existence temperance means strategically not deviating too much from what "the people" want, not taking any risks and refraining from making any decisive choice.

The critical reflections on "*ne quid nimis*" that we encounter in Kierkegaard's writings, then, should not be understood as critiquing every possible form of temperance. In these passages, as in many others, he opposes a tendency he detects in human nature: a tendency to indolence, laziness and comfort. What Kierkegaard opposes is, in other words, *mediocrity*. As has become clear in this article, Kierkegaard, through the mouth of Anti-Climacus, develops against mediocrity a view of human existence that demands everything of us and includes great intensity and risk, but that nevertheless can rightly be described as temperate.

119 *SKS* 12, 99 / *PC*, 90.