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# Self in/as Other

By Mark C. Taylor

The absolutely other is the Other. He and I do not form a number. The collectivity in which I say 'you' or 'we' is not a plural of the 'I'. I, you- -these are not individuals of a common concept. Neither possession nor the unity of number nor the unity of concepts link me to the Stranger, the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself. But the strange also means the free one. Over him I have no *power*.<sup>1</sup>

## Faces of Otherness

Why is the »author« of *The Sickness Unto Death* named »Anti-Climacus«? The most obvious way to answer this question is to locate Anti-Climacus within the context of Kierkegaard's overall pseudonymous authorship. When this is done, it becomes clear that Anti-Climacus presents a point of view which stands in marked contrast to the perspective of Johannes Climacus, the »author« of *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. While Climacus considers religious problems from a perspective which lies outside the bounds of faith proper, Anti-Climacus explores the complexities of religious thought and conduct from the point of view of an individual who is religiously committed. By approaching matters of faith from both within and without, Kierkegaard attempts to communicate (albeit indirectly) with those members of Christendom who, though they regard themselves as faithful Christians, seem to Kierkegaard to be worse than pagans.

It would, however, be a mistake to consider the significance of the name »Anti-Climacus« only in terms of Kierkegaard's strategy for communication. This pseudonym also suggests one of the most important themes which Kierkegaard examines both in *The Sickness Unto Death* and throughout his whole authorship: the nature and significance of otherness. As his name implies, Anti-Climacus is essentially an other. For this reason, he might be expected to be especially sensitive to the implications of the problem of otherness not only for his own person but for all human subjects.

In order to appreciate the abiding significance of Kierkegaard's analysis of the place of alterity in the dynamics of selfhood, it is necessary to stress the continuing importance of the issue of otherness for twentieth-century theology and philosophy. Consider, for example, the centrality of the question of the other and of the self's relation to otherness in Barth's

neo-orthodox theology and in Heidegger's existential philosophy. Various faces of the other appear and disappear in the words of writers and artists as different as Freud, Schoenberg, Kafka, Beckett, Sartre, Marcel, Levinas, Camus, Jabès, Ionesco, and Adorno. Recent French philosophical debate continues to be preoccupied with the enigma of otherness. Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida are all engaged in an exploration of different puzzles posed by alterity. Lacan labels the unconscious »the discourse of the other;« Foucault describes his study of madness as an examination of »the other«, rather than »the same«; and Derrida's critique of the »metaphysic of presence« presupposes an irreducible otherness which can never be totally present. Although not always evident, the elusive figure of Anti-Climacus lurks behind these discussions of otherness. In the following pages, I shall examine Anti-Climacus' influential analysis of the self in and as other.

### Self in Other

The rudiments of Anti-Climacus' understanding of the interplay between self and other can be found in the perplexing opening paragraphs of *The Sickness Unto Death*. Upon first reading, Anti-Climacus' description of the self sounds surprisingly Hegelian. It soon becomes clear, however, that the guise of his pseudonym affords Kierkegaard the opportunity to develop one of his most sophisticated criticisms of Hegel's position. Kierkegaard *ironically* adopts the language of speculative philosophy in order to attack Hegel from within. Like a parasite which infects its host, the ironist is a disruptive other who gnaws at the supposedly self-enclosed System. As Anti-Climacus can be understood only in relation to Climacus, so Kierkegaard must be interpreted in relation to Hegel. The depth of Kierkegaard's opposition to Hegel is evident in his ironic critique of the Hegelian notion of subjectivity.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike Anti-Climacus, Hegel nowhere presents a concise analysis of selfhood. It could be argued that his entire System is, in fact, an extended elaboration of his fundamental interpretation of subjectivity. Nonetheless, for purposes of comparison with Kierkegaard, two texts are of particular interest: *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Science of Logic*. Hegel offers his most precise definition of the subject in the »Preface« to the *Phenomenology*. The self, he argues, »is that which *relates itself to itself* and is *determinate*, it is *other-being* and *being-for-self*, and in this determinateness, or in its self-externality, abides within itself; in other words, it is *in and for itself*.«<sup>3</sup> In different terms, subjectivity is thoroughly *reflexive*. This reflexivity involves a specular relation between self and other. The reflexive subject *sees itself in the other*. The other, therefore, is not merely other; it is, in some sense, identical to the self itself. This is what Hegel means when he states that even »in its self-externality«, the self »abides within itself«.

In order to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of Hegel's complex concept of selfhood, it is necessary to recognize that his analysis of reflexive subjectivity presupposes speculative principles which do not become explicit until he writes the *Science of Logic*. In his early *Differenzschrift*,

Hegel identifies what eventually forms the cornerstone of his entire System. The beginning and end of all becoming, he contends, is »the union of union and nonunion«. In the *Logic*, Hegel recasts the problem of the mediation of union and nonunion in terms of the categories of identity and difference. By reinterpreting logical principles which lie at the base of the entire Western philosophical tradition, Hegel attempts to demonstrate the internal relation between identity and difference. According to Hegel, each of these terms passes into the other, and both join in the principle of contradiction. This interplay of opposites discloses the structure of identity-in-difference which defines the Hegelian subject. In view of the importance of Hegel's account of this issue for the counter-position which Anti-Climacus advances, it will be helpful to consider some of the details of Hegel's argument.

In order to establish the conversion of identity and difference into one another and their dialectical union in contradiction, Hegel first examines each term independently. He points out that for common sense as well as traditional logic, identity appears to be simple selfsameness which is usually regarded as exclusive of difference. Over against this point of view Hegel maintains that when self-relation is considered more carefully, it becomes apparent that abstract self-identity is actually inseparable from absolute difference. In his own words:

... identity is the reflection-into-self that is identity only as internal repulsion, and is this repulsion as reflection-into-itself, repulsion which immediately takes itself back into itself. Thus it is identity as difference that is identical with itself.<sup>4</sup>

The self-relation that informs identity is necessarily mediated by opposition to otherness. Consequently, in the act of affirming itself, identity negates itself and becomes its opposite, difference. »*Identity is difference*,« for »*identity is different from difference*«. <sup>5</sup> Conversely, difference as difference, pure or absolute difference, is indistinguishable from identity. Difference defines itself by opposition to its opposite, identity. Since Hegel argues that identity is inherently difference, he claims that in relating itself to its apparent opposite, difference really relates to itself. Relation to other turns out to be self-relation. In the act of affirming itself, difference likewise negates itself and becomes its opposite, identity. Hegel is convinced that »*difference in itself is self-related difference*; as such, it is the negativity of itself, the difference not of an other, but *of itself from itself*; it is not itself but its other. But that which is different from difference is identity. Difference is, therefore, itself and identity. Both together constitute difference; it is the whole, and its moment«. <sup>6</sup>

Identity, in itself difference, and difference, in itself identity, join in contradiction, which Hegel defines as the identity of identity and difference. Inasmuch as identity and difference necessarily include their opposites within themselves, they are inherently self-contradictory. Hegel summarizes his conclusion:

Each has a different self-subsistence of its own through the fact that it has within itself the relation to its other moment; it is thus the whole, self-contained opposition. As this whole, each is mediated with itself *by its other* and *contains* it. But further, it is mediated with itself by the *non-being of its other*; hence it is a unity existing on its own account and it *excludes* the other from itself ... It is thus contradiction.<sup>7</sup>

This speculative interpretation of identity, difference, and contradiction leads to Hegel's insistence on the internality of relationship. The identity of *both* identity and difference is constituted and maintained by relation to otherness. »In the first place, then, each *is, only insofar as the other is*; it is what it is, through the other, through its own non-being ... second, it is, *insofar as the other is not*; it is what it is, through the non-being of the other«. <sup>8</sup> In more general terms, relations are not external and accidental to antecedent identity but are internal and essential to unique particularity. In spite of appearances to the contrary, *relation to other is mediate self-relation*. Dialectical reason demonstrates that »something *through its own nature* relates itself to the other, because otherness is posited in it as its own moment; its being-within-self includes the negation within it, by means of which alone it now has its affirmative determinate being«. <sup>9</sup>

Hegel's analysis of the internal relation of identity and difference lays bare the foundational structure of subjectivity. From Hegel's perspective, subjectivity is an identity-in-difference in which opposites are *both* distinguished *and* united. Within this framework, selfhood involves »the knowledge of oneself in the externalization of oneself; the being that is the movement of retaining self-identity in its otherness«. <sup>10</sup> This reflexive self-knowledge comes to completion in speculative philosophy. The *telos* of Hegel's System can be summarized in a brief phrase: »*Pure* self-recognition in absolute otherness«. <sup>11</sup> The speculative subject discovers itself *in* the other. The *internal* relation of self and other negates both the sheer otherness of the other and the radical alterity of the self. In view of this understanding of subjectivity, it becomes apparent that Hegel's *all-inclusive* System represents an unprecedented effort to sublimate unmediated otherness in all of its forms. <sup>12</sup>

## Self as Other

Kierkegaard is convinced that the implications of speculative philosophy are highly problematic for the understanding of human subjectivity. According to Kierkegaard, Hegel's apparent mediation of opposites actually remains suspended between the horns of an irresolvable dilemma and hence fails to effect the reconciliation it promises. Speculative mediation both demands and destroys otherness. In terms of the basic structure of identity-in-difference, Kierkegaard maintains that *either* difference is real and reconciliation with otherness is not actual, *or* reconciliation with other is actual and difference is not real. On the one hand, if difference is real, as it must be on Hegel's own terms, opposites cannot be mediated, but must remain independent of, or in unmediated

antithesis to, one another. On the other hand, if Hegel's mediation of contraries is actual, opposites are merely apparently opposite and are really identical. Kierkegaard concludes that the *choice* is between a monism in which otherness and difference are epiphenomenal and a dualism in which otherness and difference are abiding features of experience which finally can be overcome, if at all, only eschatologically. There is no doubt in Kierkegaard's mind about which alternative Hegel chooses. Hegel collapses the distinctions and dissolves the oppositions which are necessary for authentic selfhood.

Kierkegaard chooses the other horn of the Hegelian dilemma. He argues that »the view that sees life's doubleness (dualism) is higher and deeper than that which seeks or 'pursues studies toward unity' (an expression from Hegel about all the endeavors of philosophy)«. <sup>13</sup> In order to reestablish the possibility of genuine selfhood, it is necessary to redefine the exclusive opposites and to rearticulate the absolute qualitative distinctions erased by speculative thought. While Hegel is engaged in the struggle to mediate bifurcated opposites, Kierkegaard seeks to differentiate undifferentiated contrasts through the exercise of what he labels »absolute distinction«. In opposition to Hegel, Kierkegaard argues:

Instead of identity annulling the principle of contradiction, it is contradiction that annuls identity ... Mediation proposes to make existence easier for the existing individual by leaving out the absolute relationship to the absolute *telos*. The exercise of the absolute distinction makes life absolutely strenuous, precisely when the individual remains in the finite and simultaneously maintains an absolute relation to the absolute *telos* and a relative relationship to the relative. <sup>14</sup>

For Kierkegaard, determinate identity is not generated by internal relation to otherness but emerges from the encounter between and among mutually exclusive individuals. To mitigate the externality of this relationship is to dissipate concrete particularity in undifferentiated oneness. Kierkegaard repeatedly maintains that »it is immovable firmness with respect to absolute distinctions that makes a man a good dialectician«. <sup>15</sup> Only by replacing Hegel's integrative dialectic of internal relationality with a dispersive dialectic of exclusive individuality and oppositional coincidence does Kierkegaard believe it possible to discern the structure of subjectivity. In an illuminating journal entry he writes: »All relative contrasts can be mediated; we do not need Hegel for this, inasmuch as the ancients point out that they can be distinguished. Personality will for all eternity protest against the idea that absolute contrasts can be mediated (and this protest is incommensurable with the assertion of mediation) ...« <sup>16</sup>

Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel's speculative logic lays the groundwork for Anti-Climacus' alternative reading of the structure of subjectivity. Anti-Climacus begins his analysis by defining the self in words which appear to paraphrase Hegel's conclusion: »Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self ...« <sup>17</sup> It soon becomes clear, however, that what Anti-

Climacus gives with one hand, he takes away with the other. Having just suggested an Hegelian interpretation of subjectivity, he proceeds to begin to cut the ground out from under Hegel's position. Anti-Climacus rephrases his point in a way that subtly dislocates his initial assertion: »... or [the self] is that in the relation by which the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not a relation, but that the relation relates itself to its own self«. It is important to underscore the significance of both the positive and negative claims. Elsewhere Kierkegaard emphasizes that in Hegel's notion of spirit, the self *is* simply the relation, and that this relation is a *negative* unity. Later in this text he explains: »In the relation between two, the relation is the third term as a negative unity, and the two relate themselves to the relation, and in the relation to the relation«. Over against Hegel, Kierkegaard contends that contraries are not identical in their difference. Nor are opposites related in such a way that each in itself is at the same time the other. As a result of his adherence to the rules of traditional logic, Kierkegaard insists that opposites are mutually exclusive and actually antithetical. Hence the self, as the structure of self-relation within which opposites meet, cannot be the »negative unity« of internally related contraries. It must be a »positive third« which actually constitutes a genuine *coincidentia oppositorum*.

The oppositions which define the subject are not, however, merely inward. The concrete realization of selfhood requires actual differentiation from otherness in all of its manifold forms. Kierkegaard identifies at least three masks of the other: natural, social, and religious. The individual self must distinguish itself relatively from its natural surroundings and its social milieu. More important than such relative differentiation is the absolute opposition between the human subject and its divine Creator. Having begun by describing the self in seemingly Hegelian terms, Anti-Climacus (true to his name) ends by inverting the speculative account of subjectivity.

Such a relation which relates itself to its own self (that is to say, a self) must either have constituted itself or have been constituted by another. If this relation which relates itself to its own self is constituted by another, the relation doubtless is the third term, but this relation (the third term) is in turn a relation relating itself to that which constituted the whole relation. Such a derived, constituted relation is the human self, a relation which relates itself to its own self, and in relating itself to its own self relates itself to another.<sup>18</sup>

The power which constitutes and sustains the human subject is radically Other. The relation between the self and Absolute Alterity *is not reflexive*. As a matter of fact, the Wholly Other, i.e., the Other which is not covertly identical to the subject, breaks the closed circuit of reflexivity. The self never discovers itself *in* this Other. To the contrary, meeting the Other as other precipitates the self's encounter with itself *as* other. In this non-reflexive relationship, otherness is not a passing phase or a transitory moment which eventually is taken up into a »higher« unity. According to *Anti-Climacus*, otherness is irreducible. The self, therefore, can be itself only as an other. The otherness of subjectivity points to the inescapable

dilemma of selfhood which is manifest in the experience of despair.

### Duplicity of Despair

The complexity of despair reflects the intricacy of subjectivity. Despair can take two forms: the despair of not willing to be oneself, and the despair of willing to be oneself. Anti-Climacus points out that »If the human self had constituted itself, there could be a question only of one form [of despair], that of not willing to be one's own self, or willing to get rid of oneself, but there would be no question of despairingly willing to be oneself«. <sup>19</sup> Careful consideration of these two types of despair suggests that they finally pass into each other. While it is unnecessary to trace the details of the argument which Anti-Climacus develops to support this claim, it is important to note his conclusion.

To despair over oneself, in despair to will to be rid of oneself, is the formula for all despair, and hence the second form of despair (in despair at willing to be oneself) can be followed back to the first (in despair at not willing to be oneself), just as in the foregoing we resolved the first into the second. <sup>20</sup>

Despair, in sum, is the self's unwillingness to be itself. The opposite of despair, then, is the self's willingness to be itself. For Kierkegaard, the structure of selfhood defines the task of subjectivity. The self must *become itself*. In words of Nietzsche written nearly half a century after Kierkegaard's death, one must »become what one is«. <sup>21</sup> To become what one is, is to become the *same*. The process of self-becoming, therefore, necessarily involves *repetition*. The paradox involved in repetition is rarely detected. In the struggle to become the *same*, the self discovers its unavoidable *difference* and inescapable *otherness*. Within Anti-Climacus' overall argument, the examination of despair is calculated to bring about the most decisive encounter between the self and Absolute Alterity.

In *Repetition*, Constantine Constantius suggests that:

The dialectic of repetition is easy; for what is repeated has been, otherwise it could not be repeated, but precisely the fact that it has been gives to repetition the character of novelty. When the Greeks said that all knowledge is recollection they affirmed that all that is has been; when one says that life is repetition one affirms that existence which has been now becomes. <sup>22</sup>

Constantine proceeds to point out that »repetition is the *interest* of metaphysics, and at the same time the interest upon which metaphysics founders; ... repetition is a *conditio sine qua non* of every dogmatic problem«. <sup>23</sup> But why does repetition destroy metaphysics? And how is it related to dogmatic problems?

In the act of repetition [*Gjentagelse*], Constantine points out, »one affirms that existence which has been now becomes«. This becoming effects a subtle shift which disrupts the circuit of reflexivity. In order to see how this occurs, it is important not to confuse sameness and identity. Sameness

does not necessarily presuppose identity. The same admits of a greater degree of difference than identity. This distinction between sameness and identity helps to clarify the difference between Hegelian self-reflexion and Kierkegaardian repetition.<sup>24</sup> Insofar as the self becomes itself through the movement of repetition, it becomes the same, though it does not become self-*identical*. Paradoxically, in becoming the same, the self becomes both itself and other. As I have indicated, Constantine emphasizes that repetition always has »the character of novelty«. This novelty establishes the self's difference from itself. In the very effort to become what one is, one becomes different – different from what one is and from what one had been. Consequently, the self can never achieve the self-identification which is both the beginning and end of Hegelian philosophy. Inasmuch as repetition subverts the possibility of absolute reflexivity, it constitutes the »interest upon which metaphysics founders«. By calling into question the assumptions and conclusions of speculative philosophy, repetition becomes the »*conditio sine qua non* of every dogmatic problem«. In order to trace this line from philosophy to theology, it is necessary to return to the problem of despair.

Despair, according to Anti-Climacus, is overcome when the self freely wills to be itself. The necessity of repetition in self-becoming, however, raises a question about the self's ability to escape despair. Despite appearances to the contrary, in willing to be itself, the self wills to be another. Anti-Climacus insists that the will to be another or the unwillingness to be oneself is *despair*. Thus it appears that the self sinks deeper into despair in the very effort to find relief from its desperate condition. Left to itself, the subject can *never* overcome despair. This despair which is apparently incurable both marks the outer limit of human existence and brings the self »to the borders of the marvelous«. <sup>25</sup> Despair, it seems, is always duplicitous. It drives the subject to the utmost extremity of human endurance in order to open the self to other – the Absolute Other in relation to which the self *can* become itself.

The opposite of despair is *faith*. Anti-Climacus argues:

This then is the formula which describes the condition of the self when despair is completely eradicated: by relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it.<sup>26</sup>

This self-relation is a gift from the divine Other rather than an achievement of the self. When all human possibilities have been exhausted, the only remaining question is whether one will believe that »for God all things are possible«. <sup>27</sup> Such belief requires a death more agonizing than death itself, a death which is the self's dying away (*af døe*) from itself. Through an unexpected reversal, the absolute »humiliation of becoming nothing in the hand of the Helper for whom all things are possible«<sup>28</sup> is at the same time the most profound exaltation of the self. From Anti-Climacus' Christian perspective, the paradox of selfhood is that one must lose oneself to find



oneself. Apart from the Other, the self can never be itself. For this reason, every self which is truly itself bears *Anti-* before its name.

Duplicitous faces of otherness: Self in other ... Self as other. The undecidable relation between Hegel and Kierkegaard continues to create the space for, and to define the bounds of, contemporary philosophical debate.

The question of the Other has long preoccupied philosophers and theologians. Only in the twentieth century, however, have the extraordinary social and political implications of the problem of Alterity become clear. In different ways, Heidegger's analysis of technology, Adorno's attack on fascism, and, more recently, Derrida's critique of presence, and Foucault's account of multiple forms of colonialism suggest the repressive implications of a specular/speculative philosophy which always discovers self *in* other. Kierkegaard, of course, foresaw all of this. His seminal interpretation of the self *as* other not only anticipates but, to a great extent, surpasses the arguments of his successors. Were Kierkegaard to return in our time, he would, no doubt, be distressed to discover how right he had been.

1. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 39.

2. It should be noted at the outset that throughout this essay, I intend to systematic distinction among the terms »self«, »subject«, and »subjectivity«.

3. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 14.

4. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, translated by A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 412.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, p. 417.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 431.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 425.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

10. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 459.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

12. It is necessary to add a word of qualification at this point. From the time of his early opposition to Schelling, Hegel insists that he *is not* a philosopher of identity who reduces difference to identity. He sees his own philosophical position as a corrective to the problems encountered by early nineteenth century *Identitätsphilosophie*. Nevertheless, there are points at which Hegel seems to leave himself open to criticism on this issue. For example, his privileging of identity is evident in the two most common formulations of the principles which ground his System. Hegel seeks the *union* of union and non-union and the *identity* of identity and difference.

13. *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, edited by H. and E. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967ff.), no. 704.

14. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, translated by D. Swenson and W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 377.

15. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, translated by D. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 136.

16. *Journals and Papers*, no. 1578.

17. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, translated by W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 146.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

21. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, translated by W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 215.

22. Kierkegaard, *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, translated by W. Lowrie (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 52.

23. *Ibid.*

24. In developing my analysis of repetition, I have been guided by Rudolph Gasché's richly suggestive essay: »Autobiography as *Gestalt*: Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*.« *Boundary II*, volumes IX, no. 3 and X, no. 1, pp. 271-290.

25. *Repetition*, p. 88.

26. *The Sickness Unto Death*, p. 147.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 205.