Narrative Identity in Kierkegaard

An analysis of Anthony Rudd’s narrative theory of selfhood in Søren Kierkegaard’s Either/Or and The Sickness unto Death

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Abstract

In this thesis, I analyse and explore Anthony Rudd’s narrative theory of selfhood in relation to Søren Kierkegaard’s works *Either/Or* and *The Sickness unto Death*. In doing so, I will present the complex concept of selfhood as presented in *Either/Or* and *The Sickness unto Death*, and accordingly discuss how these works can be read as supportive of Rudd’s theory of selfhood. I will also discuss certain problems pertaining to Rudd’s interpretation of these works, thus showing that his project can be viewed as too strong and ambitious in wanting to apply his theory of selfhood. Even though this is an apparent problem for Rudd, I believe it does not entail that we need to reject all of Rudd’s interpretation, as he successfully manages to elicit essential aspects of Kierkegaardian selfhood that can be interpreted as containing aspects of narrative identity.
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1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to investigate and analyse Anthony Rudd’s narrative theory of selfhood in relation to Søren Kierkegaard’s works *Either/Or* and *The Sickness unto Death*.\(^1\) According to Rudd, Kierkegaard’s concept of selfhood can be interpreted as containing strong aspects pertaining to narrative identity, and therefore presents a theory of selfhood that aims at justifying this claim. It is also important to stress that Rudd’s narrative theory is strongly related to a teleological understanding of selfhood. Rudd’s interpretation will therefore also consists of arguing for a teleological understanding of Kierkegaardian selfhood. As such, my discussion and analysis of Rudd’s interpretation will consist of both his teleological and narrative understanding of Kierkegaardian selfhood.

My analysis will also contain a close exploration of Kierkegaard’s works, where I will account for and discuss the complex and intricate concept of selfhood that Kierkegaard presents us with. Although Rudd’s theory is concerned with Kierkegaard’s authorship as a whole, I will restrict my analysis to *two* of Kierkegaard’s works: *Either/Or* and *The Sickness unto Death*. The reason behind this is because I view these works as representing Kierkegaard’s core idea of selfhood. This will also specify my analysis of Rudd’s interpretation, thus making the evaluation of his arguments more precise in relation to these two works.

The first part of my thesis will investigate *Either/Or* and its relation to Rudd’s narrative interpretation of Kierkegaard. Here, I will present the content of *Either/Or* and its discussion of the two life views: the aesthetic and ethical. As will be shown, these life views represents various modes of existence, where the ethical life view is understood, supposedly, as more preferable than the aesthetic life view. Rudd’s interpretation of *E/O* will therefore argue that the ethical life view contains strong aspects of narrative identity, whereas the aesthetic life view lacks these aspects.

The second part of my thesis will be concerned with *The Sickness unto Death* and its relation to Rudd’s narrative interpretation of Kierkegaardian selfhood. *The Sickness unto Death* presents us with a much more articulated, though also more complicated, picture of selfhood than the one given in *Either/Or*. In this part, I will therefore try to give a well-formulated account of how selfhood is depicted and analysed in *The Sickness unto Death*.

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Following this, I will discuss and analyse Rudd’s narrative and teleological arguments in relation to the concept of selfhood given as presented in *The Sickness unto Death.*

The third, and final part of my thesis will discuss certain problems that pertain to Rudd’s interpretation of *Either/Or* and *The Sickness unto Death.* As will be shown throughout my thesis, Rudd’s narrative understanding of selfhood in these two works is, to a large extent, justified. However, there are certain problems, discussed in this part, that will show that Rudd’s narrative theory is too strong and ambitious in its project of interpreting the whole picture of selfhood, as presented in *Either/Or* and *The Sickness unto Death,* in narrative terms.
2. *Either/Or* and narrative identity

In this part of my thesis, I will discuss *Either/Or* and its relation to selfhood and Rudd’s theory of narrative identity. In following with his interpretation of *E/O* and his view on selfhood, it will be evident that Rudd argues for a distinction between the aesthetic and ethical life view that is grounded in narrative identity. Moreover, Rudd’s analysis also consists of a teleological understanding of the Kierkegaardian self, which is an essential aspect of Rudd’s overall view on selfhood. However, before I present Rudd’s narrative arguments and their relation to *E/O*, a proper account of the philosophical content in Kierkegaard’s work is needed. As such, part 2 will be divided into two main chapters. Chapter 2.1 will give an account of how *E/O* presents us with two different life views, the ethical and aesthetic, which will serve as the background for the Rudd’s analysis. Following this, Chapter 2.2 will be centred on Rudd’s narrative view on *E/O*, as well as his teleological understanding of Kierkegaardian selfhood. Finally, I will present a conclusion of this part.

2.1. *Either/Or* and its discussion of the aesthetic and ethical

In giving an account of *E/O*, I hope to present the main points from both parts, thus creating a background for the discussion on narrative identity later in Chapter 2.2. To begin with, it is worth noting that *E/O*’s main project is to present the reader with two different views of life, or spheres of existence. These two views of life are the aesthetic and ethical. The book is accordingly divided into two parts, with each part being presented by a pseudonymous author. Part One is written by the aesthete A and presents various accounts of aesthetic existence. In contrast, Part Two presents the ethical life, as opposed to aesthetic existence, and is written by the pseudonymous author B, or Judge Vilhelm. Moreover, Victor Eremita, another pseudonym, is the editor of *E/O*. In presenting the reader with these two opposing views of life, *E/O* also presents the reader with an ultimate question, or choice: either choose to live aesthetically, or choose to live ethically.

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2 I will use the abbreviation *E/O* from now on. I will also reference the Danish edition from sks.dk, where the first part of *E/O* is labelled as SKS 2, 7 – 291, and the second part as SKS 3, 7 – 315.

3 The positioning of Kierkegaard himself within the philosophical context in *E/O* may therefore be ambiguous, given the various pseudonyms within the work. Albeit this, *E/O* still contains essential concepts and ideas that are present throughout Kierkegaard’s authorship, and I therefore regard a discussion of its content more worthwhile than discussing how we are to place Kierkegaard philosophically within his various pseudonymous works.
2.1.1. The aesthetic life view

In part one of E/O, the aesthete A presents us with eight different texts that portray the aesthetic life view. These texts are also aesthetic in style and form, as opposed to Vilhelm’s more normative and lectured styled letters, and varies from the aphorisms in the Diapsalmata, to an essay on music, or the autobiographical style of The Seducer’s Diary. Accordingly, in understanding the aesthetic texts, it is important to note the development of how the aesthetic life view is presented throughout Part One of E/O. Apart from The Seducer’s Diary, which is more or less understood as having been written by Johannes, and not A, all the other texts in E/O seem to represent the aesthetic life view of A. The first text, Diapsalmata, expresses the despair and “paralysis of will” that A is experiencing. In these aphorisms, epigrams or anecdotes, A describes how he struggles to find meaning in life and how the world around him also seems to be meaningless. This is expressed by claiming that the world is “without passion” and that he is “just one of the threads to be woven into life’s calico.” He also expresses his desire to keep all possibilities in life open, thus never committing himself to something that can be actualized in life. He explains that to make a definite choice between an either/or always results in regret:

If you marry, you will regret it; if you do not marry you will also regret it; if you marry or if you do not marry, you will regret both, whether you marry or you do not marry, you will regret both.

As such, A views possibilities, and not their actualization, as pleasing; “Pleasure disappoints, not possibilities.”

The text following the Diapsalmata is more concerned with aesthetics through the medium of art, where a discussion on sensuality in music is presented in The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical Erotic. Following this, a series of three essays discusses melancholy themes such as sorrow, pain, grief and unhappiness. One of these essays, The Unhappiest One, discusses the “unhappy individual” and how his unhappiness is a result of never being present to himself. A writes that “the unhappy man is always absent from himself, never present to himself” and that unhappy individuals can be viewed as either hoping or remembering individuals in which there is no present. After these three essays, a text called The First Love gives us an interpretation of a play by A. E. Scribe, thus making a sudden return to the discussion of aesthetics in art.

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5 Kierkegaard, E/O, 48-49/SKS 2, 36 & 40.
6 Ibid. 54/SKS 2, 47.
7 Ibid. 57/SKS 2, 50.
8 Ibid. 214/SKS 2, 216.
However, the development of A’s thought and aesthetic life view is most apparent in the essay *Crop Rotations*. Here, A discusses the theme of boredom and claims that it is the “root of all evil.”9 In his discussion, A presents various aesthetic principles that can help one escape the evil of boredom. One of these principles states that one should “always change the method of cultivation”, which is to limit oneself and thus becoming more resourceful.10 Moreover, A claims that “only when one has thrown hope overboard is it possible to live artistically; as long as one hopes, one cannot limit oneself.”11 In relation to this, A gives a description of how we are to manipulate recollection, which in turn prevents one from “sticking fast in some particular circumstance in life and ensure perfect suspension.”12 It thus becomes apparent that A’s earlier expressive concern of lacking meaning in life and keeping all possibilities open has now developed into more abstract principles, which he is to comply with. Furthermore, these principles seem to imply that what A is really concerned with is freedom and the rejection of committing oneself to certain practices or relationships. The latter is best expressed when he continues in *The Crop Rotations* by arguing against friendship and marriage, and claiming that “one must always be careful not to enter into any life-relation in which one can become several” and “when you are several you have lost your freedom.”13

The last text in Part One of E/O is *The Seducer’s Diary*, and although I will not give a summary of its content, it is important to note how A and Victor Eremita views this final aesthetic text. As mentioned earlier, *The Seducer’s Diary* seems to be written by another author and not by A himself. This is supported by the preface A writes to the diary, and how some of the associated letters are addressed to a person called Johannes. In the preface, A expresses his distaste towards Johannes and his actions as described in the diary. However he also acknowledges that Johannes’ life has been “an attempt to realize the task of living poetically”, and how this is followed by a “keenly developed sense for what is interesting in life.”14 Moreover, this realization is carried out by Johannes’ constant reproduction of adhering to the interesting. That is, Johannes is always finding new ways in his life of cultivating the interesting. Albeit this, A still seems troubled by Johannes’ behaviour and views his actions as affecting Johannes inwardly, by claiming that he will never fully embrace his bad conscience, but it will still keep him awake at night. In contrast to A’s attitude towards

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9 Ibid. 228/SKS 2, 276.
10 Ibid. 233/SKS 2, 281.
11 Ibid. 234/SKS 2, 282.
12 Ibid. 236/SKS 2, 284.
13 Ibid. 237/SKS 2, 286.
14 Ibid. 248/SKS 2, 294.
Johannes, Victor Eremita, the editor of E/O, questions whether A actually is the author of the diary. He writes in the preface to E/O that A’s mood “betrays the writer”, and that it is “as if A himself had become afraid of his work.” On the reason behind this suspicion, Eremita writes:

If these were actual events to which he had been witness, it seems strange that the preface bears no stamp of A’s joy of seeing the realization of the idea that had often hovered before his mind. This idea of the seducer’s is suggested in the essay on the ‘Immediate Erotic’ as well as in ‘Shadowgraphs’, namely the idea that the analogue of Don Juan must be a reflected seducer who works within the category of the interesting, where the thing is therefore not how many he seduces but how he does it. I find no trace of such joy in the preface but rather, as noted, a trembling, a certain horror, which is no doubt due to his poetical relation to this idea.

Although Eremita’s suspicion is interesting and seemingly justified, it is of little concern with regards to my main project. The essential point to keep in mind from The Seducer’s Diary is the role of the interesting and how the aesthetic individual, whether it is A or Johannes, cultivates this.

2.1.2. The ethical life view

In contrast to the aesthetic view of life is the ethical, which is presented by Judge Vilhelm in Part two of E/O. The ethical view of life is accounted for as part of a critique of the aesthetic life and is mainly addressed to A. Following this, it is important to point out that the aesthetic view of life is the “default position that is occupied by anyone who is not consciously committed to living by ethical or religious values.” As such, Judge Vilhelm’s critique of the aesthetic life and A is also an appeal to leaving behind the aesthetic and choosing the ethical view of life. According to Vilhelm, the most essential aspect of the aesthetic view of life is immediacy. Although there are various forms of aesthetic existence that differ from A’s aesthetic life view, they all share the essential similarity of valuing immediacy.

The immediate nature of the aesthete, as described by Vilhelm, is expressed as their inability to have continuity in their lives and never choosing absolutely. The aesthetic person lives only in the moment and chooses arbitrarily. Vilhelm argues that the aesthetic choice is “either wholly immediate, thus no choice, or it loses itself in multiplicity.” The aesthetic choice is fleeting and the aesthete, therefore, never really commits to the actual choice being made. The emphasis on choice is essential to Judge Vilhelm’s critique of the aesthetic and to

15 Ibid. 32/SKS 2, 16.
16 Ibid./SKS 2, 16-17.
17 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 70.
his argumentation for the ethical life view. In his letter to A, Vilhelm underlines the
importance of choice and its relation to personality. He writes: “choice itself is decisive for a
personality’s content; in choice personality immerses itself in what is chosen (…)”\(^{19}\)
In contrast to the aesthetic choice, the ethical person chooses the ethical by way of choosing
absolutely. That is, one must choose the absolute, and the absolute, according to Vilhelm, is
“myself in my eternal validity.”\(^{20}\) So, what does Vilhelm mean by this? The ethical, as
presented above, is best understood as self-choice. As opposed to aesthetic choice, which is
arbitrary and fleeting, ethical self-choice is grounded in the idea of there being an eternal
dimension of your self that is constantly present. A self is, according to Vilhelm, both ‘the
most abstract thing of all’ and “the most concrete thing of all”, which he claims is freedom.\(^{21}\)
The concept of freedom is used here to express our ability to choose ourselves and create
ourselves. However, Vilhelm also points out that since there is something eternal in us, we
cannot fully create ourselves. Therefore, Vilhelm explains that ethical self-choice, i.e., to
choose oneself absolutely, makes two dialectical movements, simultaneously, which is also a
paradoxical movement. Vilhelm writes:

what is chosen does not exist and comes into existence through the choice, and what is chosen exists,
otherwise it would not be a choice. For if the thing I chose did not exist but became absolute through
the choice itself, I would not have chosen, I would have created. But I do not create myself, I choose
myself.\(^ {22}\)

The paradoxical aspect of the ethical self-choice is apparent from the quote; I must make
ethical choices to be a self, but to make such choices, I must already be a self. This can be
related to the view of the aesthetic as being the default position of selfhood. Even though the
aesthetic individual has not made the ethical self-choice, he must still be regarded as a self. As
such, the aesthetic individual has the potentiality of choosing the ethical. It is whether he
decides to actualize this potentiality that is essentially different from the ethical individual.
Another important aspect of the ethical self-choice is how Vilhelm stresses that we do not
create ourselves, but choose ourselves. Vilhelm asserts that we are “born of the principle of
contradiction”, which is grounded in his view that we are free spirits (individuals), but we
also have an immediate individual existence.\(^ {23}\) So, Vilhelm’s point is to show the importance
of acknowledging our individual factual features such as history, social relationships, personal
traits and dispositions, i.e., our selfhood as being this concrete individual being. This aspect of

\(^{19}\) Ibid. 482/SKS 3, 160.
\(^{20}\) Ibid. 516/SKS 3, 205.
\(^{21}\) Ibid.
\(^{22}\) Ibid. 517/SKS 3, 207.
\(^{23}\) Ibid.
ourselves should not be suppressed or wished away, but rather chosen and we should, accordingly, take responsibility for it. Following this, Vilhelm’s emphasis on selfhood being chosen and not created is grounded in the idea that we must make commitments to aspects of our selfhood, which is wholly different from an aesthetic life view.

Vilhelm’s critique of aesthetic existence also shows how the aesthetic life view is fundamentally one of despair. As with Anti-Climacus’ analysis of selfhood in *The Sickness unto Death*, Judge Vilhelm also uses the concept of despair as an important concept within his critique of the aesthetic life view. Vilhelm’s use of the concept is, however, more minimal than Anti-Climacus’ use. In contrast to Anti-Climacus, where everyone can be in despair, Vilhelm understands the phenomenon as a state that is primarily related to aesthetic existence. Moreover, he also views despair as a choice, which entails that one must become conscious of being in despair and accordingly choose it. As such, by choosing one’s own despair, one will subsequently choose oneself and ultimately the ethical. In his description of despair and its relation to the aesthetic life view, Vilhelm explains that we can distinguish between unconscious despair and conscious despair.²⁴ Unconscious despair is, according to Vilhelm, a condition that is most common in the general forms of aestheticism, which are best expressed as the pursuit of pleasure, wealth, social status etc. As Vilhelm states, the most general description of the meaning or aim in this aesthetic life view is the enjoyment of life.²⁵ Although he does not give a clear-cut reason for their despair, Vilhelm explains that these aesthetes “were in despair beforehand”, which seems to imply that the aesthetic life is constitutive for despair.²⁶ This view is further supported by Vilhelm when he writes: “Every aesthetic view of life is despair, and that everyone who lives aesthetically is in despair whether he knows it or not.”²⁷ Accordingly, Vilhelm explains that once one has become conscious of one’s own despair, the choosing of the ethical becomes “an inescapable requirement”.²⁸ Following from this, Vilhelm stresses that the aesthetic person should choose despair, which in turn will lead to choosing oneself ethically. On the other hand, despair cannot be of something particular or external, but it must be a despair of oneself. As Vilhelm writes: “once you have found your own self in despair you will love it for being the world that it is.”²⁹ As such, Vilhelm stresses that the aesthetic individual that is conscious of his own despair must choose this despair, and thus gaining a certain transparency of himself, which in

²⁴ Ibid. 502/SKS 3, 186.
²⁵ Ibid. 493/SKS 3, 175.
²⁶ Ibid. 502/SKS 3, 186.
²⁷ Ibid.
²⁸ Ibid.
²⁹ Ibid. 511/SKS 3, 200-201.
turn enables him to choose himself in his eternal validity and become ethical. Furthermore, Vilhelm also explains that A, as an aesthetic individual, is also in despair, but points out that he is reluctant to choose it. As such, A is “constantly beyond himself” and “always hovering above himself.”

He has the reflective awareness to recognize his own despair and the vanity of his aesthetic existence, but his reluctance to commit himself to certain projects or relationships and have continuity in his life entails that he is not willing choose his despair, which is to choose the ethical, and ultimately himself.

2.2. Anthony Rudd, narrative and Either/Or

Rudd’s view on the ethical and aesthetic life view as presented in E/O is accounted for in a series of essays, where Rudd argues that the choice of the ethical life is a rational choice, and that Vilhelm’s view of the ethical life is closely related to a MacIntyrean conception of narrative identity. In spite of E/O’s various pseudonymous authors, Rudd holds the view that Kierkegaard endorses, to some extent, Vilhelm’s critique of the aesthetic, thus viewing the main project of E/O as a powerful critique of aesthetic existence. The narrative claims that Rudd presents are therefore grounded in the critical view on the aesthetic life view. In arguing for how the aesthetic individual lacks certain characteristics of narrative identity, Rudd wants to show how this represents his inability to become fully himself, i.e., to choose himself (ethically). Accordingly, the ethical life view stands as the counterpart to the aesthetic, and can therefore be characterized as presenting a life view that has narrative identity, in the strictest sense. In discussing Rudd’s arguments and analysis of the Kierkegaardian self, as presented in E/O, I will divide this chapter into three sections: 2.2.1. Teleological selfhood, 2.2.2. Narrative identity and the aesthete A, and 2.2.3. General cases of aestheticism and serious aestheticism. The first section presents Rudd’s view on Kierkegaardian selfhood as teleological, and how this stands in relation to E/O and his narrative view. Following this, section two will be mainly concerned with Rudd’s analysis of aesthete A, where he argues that A lacks the essential characteristics of narrative identity. The final section will discuss the

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30 Ibid. 503-504/SKS 3, 188 & 192.
more general accounts of aestheticism, as well as serious aestheticism, and discuss whether Rudd’s narrative claims against \( A \) can be applied to these forms of aestheticism.

2.2.1. Teleological selfhood

According to Rudd, Kierkegaard can be regarded as having a platonic teleological understanding of human nature. This claim is not only important to Rudd’s understanding of the ethical life in \( E/O \), but to his overall claim that Kierkegaard’s view on selfhood is best understood in narrative terms. In his account of the Kierkegaardian self, Rudd explains that there exists a tension between what he calls *self-shaping* and *self-acceptance*, or our transcendence and immanence, within the self. The self that Kierkegaard argues for, according to Rudd, is neither something given, nor something that creates itself. It is “something that exists in and through the shaping of itself and in constantly negotiating the limits of what it can and cannot alter.”

This tension is best presented in Anti-Climacus’ ontology of selfhood in *The Sickness unto Death*, but it is also representative of the overall view on selfhood that Kierkegaard has. Following this view, Rudd explains that our *telos* is to become fully ourselves, which is only possible by reconciling this inherent tension.

Rudd continues his analysis of the teleology in Kierkegaard’s view on selfhood, by claiming that there exists three *teloi* that needs to be fulfilled in order to achieve full selfhood. Accordingly, Rudd views the teleology in Kierkegaard’s writings as essentially threefold: (i) I can achieve full selfhood only by reconciling the inherent tension in my self, (ii) this is only possible by directing my self to particular goals, projects and other individuals, (iii) this, again, is only possible if I have an unconditional and underlying commitment to the Good.

Our commitment to the Good is, according to Rudd, our most fundamental *telos* and serves as a normative standard to which we relate. However, Rudd’s concept of the Good is different from Kierkegaard’s own conception. For Kierkegaard, the Good is, ultimately, God as understood in Christianity. On this view, the Good becomes more of a transcendental entity than an objective normative standard. Even though Rudd’s deviation from Kierkegaard’s definite conception of the Good is evident, his motivations for doing so is grounded in his project of analysing Kierkegaard’s structural account of selfhood, while using a more broad

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32 Ibid. 43.
33 The talk of 'fully ourselves’ is related to the view of Kierkegaardian selfhood as being qualitative or variable in degrees. This is best expressed in *Sickness*, where selfhood is truly achieved when certain conditions are fulfilled.
34 Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 49.
sense of the Good.\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, Rudd also states that this conception of the Good is more related to Kierkegaard’s ethical sphere, and not his religious sphere.\textsuperscript{36} Accordingly, to make Rudd’s understanding of selfhood in \textit{E/O} more intelligible, we must look at his conception of the Good and how this is expressed in \textit{E/O}.

As mentioned above, Rudd’s threefold teleological understanding of the Kierkegaardian self views an underlying commitment to the Good as our most fundamental \textit{telos}. The two other \textit{teloi} are also necessary in the ontology of Kierkegaardian selfhood, as presented by Rudd, but their realization is wholly dependent upon this underlying commitment to the Good. One of the reasons that support this claim has to do with how we relate properly to our \textit{telos} in the second sense, i.e., relating to particular projects, causes, people etc. Rudd explains that there is a “minimal” and “richer” teleological view on selfhood in Kierkegaard. Both views understand that to achieve full selfhood, i.e., our \textit{telos} in the first sense, the self must direct itself towards something else than its own self. This is the essential requirement that is needed to reconcile with the inherent tension in ourselves. The minimal teleological view understands this “something else” as being dependent upon the choosing of the individual. That is, “the self needs something outside itself to will; but the particular something it wills only becomes significant because the self has chosen to will it.”\textsuperscript{37} In contrast to the minimal view, Rudd explains that the richer teleological view understands this “something” as being a “specific other”.\textsuperscript{38} This specific other is, according to Rudd, the Good. As mentioned above, this deviates from Kierkegaard’s position where the specific other is ultimately God. However, the reason Rudd views the richer view as being more preferable is because it gives us an understanding of \textit{how} we are to relate and commit to particular projects, relationships etc. On this he writes:

\begin{quote}
Beyond the particular commitments which different selves may make, there needs to be a more basic commitment to the Good, which every self makes, and on the basis of which it can properly choose the particular commitments that it does.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

In contrast to having a commitment to God, Rudd’s use of the Good seems to make more sense of the various goods of which we are concerned with in life. Moreover, the normative value of certain practices, projects etc. will also be conditioned by our commitment to the Good, as opposed to any theological values or dogmas.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid. 46.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. 143-146
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid. 44.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. 45.
According to Rudd, the commitment to particular projects or relationships, i.e., our *telos* in the second sense, cannot be grounded in an arbitrary act of pure will nor a choice based on a current strong desire. In accordance with Rudd’s concept of transcendence and immanence, a choice grounded in an arbitrary act of will, would indicate “excessive transcendence”.40 This could be illustrated by imagining a person choosing to marrying another person, where his commitment to do so was based on him wanting to do so, but not in an underlying reason such as love or any other emotional or practical reason. Such a person would seemingly be viewed as not committing himself *properly* to the choice being made, and thus not realizing his *telos* in the second sense. Rudd’s use of the concept “excessive transcendence” is grounded in his view of the concept transcendence and how it is analogous with the idea of self-shaping. In relation to the current discussion, excessive transcendence would therefore indicate that a person’s actions is solely based on their will and lacks any other dimension of self-awareness, which would be their immanent side, or underlying motives such as the Good. A person making a commitment based on a current strong desire would also be at fault, and would indicate “excessive immanence”.41 Such a person could for example choose to marry another person, but his commitment would be grounded in his a fleeting desire that was strongest at the moment of making the commitment. Accordingly, such a person could easily withdraw his commitment once the desire disappeared, and must therefore be viewed as not relating properly to the *telos* in the second sense. Excessive immanence is also grounded in Rudd’s view of the concept immanence, which is related to the idea of self-acceptance. Excessive immanence can therefore be viewed as a person’s inability or failure to exercise her/his freedom/will in making commitments, and is instead solely dependent upon his/her current desires and natural inclinations. Accordingly, both cases of *choice*, as described above, can be viewed as having the *form* of choice but lacking the “proper” reasons that grounds their choice. The reasons, or *the* reason, that is to be the underlying incentive for our choices is, according to Rudd, the Good.

To avoid cases of excessive transcendence and immanence, Rudd explains that we need authoritative criteria that can guide us in making commitments. That is, we need a prior commitment to the Good, if we are to relate properly to our *telos* in the second sense. This requirement of relating *properly* to particular projects and relationships is clearly present in judge Vilhelm’s critique of the aesthetic life view. His emphasis on self-choice, i.e., to choose the ethical, is contrasted with the claim that aesthetic choice is either “wholly immediate, thus

40 Ibid. 47.
41 Ibid.
no choice, or it loses itself in multiplicity." To illustrate a case of the former, Vilhelm uses an example of a young girl that makes a choice based on what her heart tells her, which shows that her choice was immediate and grounded in a current desire. This is analogous with Rudd’s talk of excessive immanence. In the latter case, Vilhelm explains that an aesthetic person, who considers a range of possibilities in life, would most likely arrive at a multiplicity of possible choices, and not at an absolute either/or. Accordingly, the choice being made could easily be revoked and the aesthetic person would choose something else the next instant. Following this, Vilhelm concludes that an aesthetic choice is actually no choice at all. This criticism of aesthetic choice is grounded in Vilhelm’s view on the act of choosing, which he considers as a “literal and strict expression of the ethical.” Vilhelm explains that to choose (ethically), in a strict sense, is to choose absolutely between an either/or. As such, one avoids the arbitrary and immediate nature of the aesthetic life view. To choose ethically can therefore be viewed as fully committing oneself to the possibility that is being chosen. In light of this, the requirement of relating properly to particular projects and relationships becomes more intelligible.

However, the pressing question pertaining to this argument is how we are to ground our choosing of the ethical. That is, if choosing absolutely between an either/or, how am I to ground my choice and avoid making an aesthetic choice? Rudd’s answer to this problem, which was presented above, is that must have a prior commitment to the Good. Vilhelm’s view of this underlying commitment is best expressed in his view on how the ethical lies inside the individual. According to Vilhelm, the ethical, or the Good, is an inherent potential that must be acknowledged and, accordingly, chosen by the individual. As such, the ethical self-choice becomes contingent of our acknowledgment of the ethical as an inherent potential. This is why Rudd views our underlying commitment to the Good as our most fundamental telos. As Rudd writes himself, “the ethical self is there in potential before the choice of the ethical is made; what the judge is urging A to do is to actualize this potential.” The grounding of our choices in an underlying commitment to the Good is therefore only possible once we have recognized our potential for ethical selfhood and our realization of this potential. Once this has been done, the two other teloi, i.e., (i) to achieve full selfhood, and (ii) relating properly to particular projects and relationships, can be realized. The underlying commitment to the Good would serve as the background for all our choices and commitments, thus

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42 Kierkegaard, E/O, 485/SKS 3, 163.
43 Ibid.
44 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 76.
avoiding cases of excessive transcendence or immanence. Accordingly, this would also enable us to reconcile the inherent tension in ourselves, thus achieving “full selfhood” as opposed to an aesthetic self, or a self that lacks the inherent balance between his transcendent and immanent sides.

Rudd’s teleological view on E/O is primarily grounded in the distinction between aesthetic and ethical existence. In arguing for a threefold teleology at work in Kierkegaardian selves, Rudd posits the fundamental conditions for selfhood. Notwithstanding a specific life view, such as the aesthetic or ethical, Rudd’s teleological view entails that any person who does not live in accordance with his teloi is not fully a self, or lives an inauthentic life. In relation to the context of E/O, the failure to realize one’s underlying teloi is characteristic of the aesthetic life view, which is evident from Vilhelm’s criticism of that life view. Moreover, by arguing for the Good as our most fundamental telos, Rudd’s teleological claims is also more aligned with the ethical life view, which is conditioned by ethical values. In living in accordance with the Good, our lives and actions are always situated within an ethical/normative framework. As such, by virtue of becoming ethical individuals, our lives and actions are always in accordance with underlying ethical values. However, as Rudd explains, we cannot make full sense of the teleological view of the Kierkegaardian self without understanding its temporal dimension in narrative terms. The narrative understanding of selfhood, that Rudd endorses, is grounded in the claim that selves are temporally structured as a unified narrative. Moreover, a self that is temporally structured in narrative terms also has a narrative self-understanding, i.e., a self-understanding in light of one’s narrative. In having such a narrative self-understanding, we are more likely to be conscious of our teleological nature due to the holistic view of our selfhood. As Rudd’s states, we are always, to some extent, conscious of our teleological nature. However, it is not given that one is fully conscious of one’s teleological nature. As such, Rudd explains that by having a narrative self-understanding, one becomes more conscious of whether one’s life/narrative is in accordance with one’s teloi. Following this, Rudd’s narrative claims about Kierkegaardian selfhood is grounded in the presuppositions that narrative is the best form of understanding the temporality of selves and accordingly their teleological nature.

45 Ibid. 163.
46 Ibid. 171.
2.2.2. Narrative identity and the aesthete A

Before we begin to view Rudd’s narrative view on E/O, we need to differentiate between the various narrative concepts that Rudd uses in his analysis. Narrative identity consists primarily of two aspects: the narrative structure of our lives, and our understanding of this structure. The first aspect involves viewing our lives as structured in narrative terms. Moreover, it is important to stress that having a narratively structured life consist of having narrative unity. Rudd explains that having narrative unity involves having “one’s life structured as an intelligible narrative.” To have narrative intelligibility involves viewing the narrative structure as a form that connects events and actions over time, which makes them comprehensible. Accordingly, the larger and more unified narrative implies that the narrative is more intelligible. As such, a “good” narrative unity involves a strong sense of viewing one’s life as a unified whole. This relates to the second aspect, our narrative self-understanding, which consists of understanding oneself as a unified whole within a narrative. In having this form of self-understanding, one’s life becomes more intelligible by virtue of being situated within a large and unified narrative context, rather than having a self-understanding that is concentrated on separate and episodic events. As such, narrative unity is essential to our narrative self-understanding. In wanting to understand the “dynamics” of narrative unity and narrative self-understanding, we can identify three essential characteristics that pertains to these concepts: (i) commitment and continuity, (ii) responsibility of past and future actions, and (iii) meaningful pattern, i.e., progression towards the realization of a meaningful goal. All these characteristics are closely interrelated and constitutive of a unified narrative life, and our self-understanding in light of that narrative. In relation to Rudd’s analysis of E/O, it will be shown that the aesthetic life view fails to incorporate at least one of these three essential characteristics.

Rudd’s discussion of narrative identity and its relation to E/O is mainly concerned with the distinction between the aesthetic and ethical life view, and how this distinction is grounded in having/not having a narrative identity. In keeping with Vilhelm’s view that aesthetic individuals are in despair, Rudd argues that the main reason for the aesthete’s despair is due to his lack of narrative structure in life. Viewed more specifically, we could view the aesthetic life view as lacking the essential characteristics that is constitutive of a narrative identity. It is also important to note that Rudd’s interpretation of the aesthetic life view is primarily centred on the aesthetic individual A. Rudd’s reason for focusing on the

47 Ibid. 170.
48 Rudd, Reason in Ethics, 138.
particularity of A is grounded in the view that A stands as the most “serious challenge to the ethical life.”\(^{49}\) It is due to A’s distinctive representation of aestheticism that drives Vilhelm’s argumentation for the ethical and against the aesthetic. Furthermore, as will be discussed later, A’s conscious awareness of his own despair, and his subsequent refusal to choose the ethical, places him in a particular position in contrast to more general cases of aestheticism. In light of this, Rudd argues that A must have a narrative unified life to avoid the despairing state he is in, which is only possible through choosing the ethical life view.

In analysing A’s aesthetic existence, it is important to mention three main claims that Rudd points out in presenting his lack of narrative structure. Firstly, A refuses to commit to certain practices or relationships over an extended period of time, which entails that his life is fragmented. Accordingly, Rudd states, “there is no coherent storyline running through his life.”\(^{50}\) This is apparent when we view A’s rejection of commitment in *Crop Rotation*, where he warns the reader of committing oneself to relationships such as friendship or marriage. On this, Rudd writes: “the aesthete will enter into relationships with others, will fill social positions and roles, but he will not see them as conferring any identity on him.”\(^{51}\) This is further expressed by A when he writes that “to abstain from friendship doesn’t mean that you are to live without human contact (…) What one must watch out for is never to stick fast.”\(^{52}\) Accordingly, it is evident that A does not have any lasting commitments that can give his life/narrative a sense of continuity. However, it is also important to note that Rudd acknowledges the fact that A, as an agent, does have some grasp of a temporal structure. In spite of this, it is still evident that any sense of continuity that is conditioned by lasting commitments is lacking in A’s life. The second main claim against A is that he lacks a sense of responsibility for his past and present actions. That is, his past actions do not have any real significance over his present actions, and his present actions are not meaningful in their contributing to future goals. Thirdly, and most fundamentally according to Rudd, A lacks a sense of his life having any “meaningful pattern”.\(^{53}\) That is, his life is not viewed as progressing towards a realization of any significant goal/s that matter to him. This pursuit towards the realization of a particular *telos* can be viewed in a weak or strict sense. The weak sense views our lives as having a minimal teleology, which would entail that we need to have some goal/s that can make our lives meaningful. The strict sense is more applicable to *E/O*

\(^{49}\) Rudd, *Reason in Ethics: Revisited*, 192.
\(^{50}\) Ibid. 191.
\(^{53}\) Rudd, *Reason in Ethics: Revisited*, 191
and Rudd’s position, where there exists an objective telos in human life. As mentioned before, this is the Good in Rudd’s interpretation and the ethical in E/O. As such, the meaning in our lives has to be found rather than created. Following this, it is apparent that A must become more conscious of his underlying teleological nature, which, as was mentioned earlier, is best achieved through having a narrative identity.

In light of Rudd’s three claims about A, it is important to stress that they are all interrelated. The choices and commitments that A makes are fleeting or arbitrary, which Vilhelm calls attention to in his description of aesthetic choice. As mentioned earlier, an aesthetic choice, according to Vilhelm, is no choice at all, because one never fully immerses oneself in the choice. Accordingly, A does not feel any sense of responsibility over his actions and their meaning within a temporal context, as opposed to the ethical individual. More importantly, A does not seem to view his past as having any meaning to his present life, and how this accordingly will shape his future. This is expressed in Crop Rotation where he writes how one should manipulate the art of forgetting and remembering, thus never having any “real” connection with one’s past. In skilfully manipulating the role of memory, A writes that the temporary achieved identity is “the Archimedean point with which one lifts the whole world.” By obtaining this independent view, A seems to fully embrace the aspect of self-shaping, in which he can apply any meaning to his past and present life. This plays on A’s strong desire for freedom and never committing himself. In contrast to this, Rudd views the ability to understand one’s past as having meaning for both one’s present and future life as an aspect of self-acceptance, which is essential to the ethical life view, as well as his narrative view on selfhood. Self-acceptance represents our capacity to accept certain aspects of our selfhood, rather than trying to alter or control them. Such aspects could be nationality, history, milieu, language, psychology or natural desires. All these aspects contribute in shaping and determining certain factual aspects of our own selfhood. As such, it is also similar to Heidegger and Sartre’s discussion on the concept of facticity. On the relation between Rudd’s concept of self-acceptance and the ethical individual, we can look at a passage by judge Vilhelm in E/O:

(…) a person who chooses himself ethically chooses himself concretely as this definite individual (…) the individual is then aware of himself as this definite individual, with these aptitudes, these tendencies,
these instincts, these passions, influenced by these definite surroundings, as this definite product of a
definite outside world. But in becoming self-aware in this way, he assumes responsibility for it all.\textsuperscript{57}

This aspect of “assuming responsibility for it all” is what $A$ is lacking. There is no
“framework of reference to a meaningful past and future”, as Rudd puts it, which implies that
$A$ does not seem to have a strong identification with his past or future self.\textsuperscript{58} This is also
similar to Galen Strawson’s view on episodic selfhood and his criticism of narrative identity.
In following with Strawson’s view, I can distinguish between my inner self (self*) and the
‘public history of the human being Mattias Bjartveit (the MB Self). Although I am aware of
and accept responsibility for MB’s history, I have no inner sense of being the same self* as
the MB self.\textsuperscript{59} This episodic view on selfhood stands as critique against narrative identity
theories because it shows how a self can lack sense of identification with his or her own
narrative. In light of Strawson’s view, $A$ can therefore be regarded as having an episodic self
in which he has no sense of identification with his past or future self. However, by accepting
this view, both Vilhelm and Rudd’s critique of $A$’s apparent problems seems to lose its
value.\textsuperscript{60} Notwithstanding Strawson’s view, it is apparent that $A$ has no sense of responsibility
or identification with his past or future. $A$’s rejection of a meaningful past is further expressed
in one of $A$’s papers where he writes, “Every life-situation must possess no more importance
than that one can forget it whenever one wants to (...)”.\textsuperscript{61}

It is this rejection of responsibility of one’s past, which leads to Rudd’s third claim
against $A$. In not assuming responsibility for how his present self can shape his future, his life
lacks any teleological significance and to some extent continuity, which Vilhelm himself
points out when he states that $A$’s life lacks both “continuity” and his actions are “done with
as little teleology as possible.”\textsuperscript{62} The rejection of feeling responsible for one’s own past and
future also connects with Rudd’s view on narrative self-understanding, i.e., our first-personal
narratives. This narrative self-understanding consists of understanding one’s own
characteristics and to be self-reflectively aware of one’s past and future. This entails that one
must have an understanding of one’s past life as being relevant for one’s present self and how
this can affect my future ambitions and goals. Moreover, this self-understanding requires a
“background narrative sense”, which entails that one must understand one’s life as a whole.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{57} Kierkegaard, E/O, 542/SKS 3, 239.
\textsuperscript{58} Rudd, Reason in Ethics: Revisited, 194.
10.1111/j.1467-9329.2004.00264.x
\textsuperscript{60} Although this is an interesting point, I will not discuss it further in this chapter.
\textsuperscript{61} Kierkegaard, E/O, 234/SKS 2, 282.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid. 503/SKS 3, 189.
\textsuperscript{63} Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 186-7.
The understanding of one’s life as a whole is something that A does not have, or something that he consciously rejects. However, this kind of self-understanding is not to be understood literally. I can never completely understand my life as a whole, since there are certain events that I will never have a first-personal experience of or cannot possibly anticipate. The important point about narrative self-understanding is that it is strongly related to our phenomenological experience of our lives, which consists of experiencing it as a meaningful whole, rather than as a series of unrelated events, which is more similar to Strawson’s episodic view.

Another important point made about A is how his lack of narrative unity is related to his unwillingness to acknowledge his teleological nature. As have been mentioned, one of the main claims against A was that he refuses to take responsibility and commit himself to particular projects and to himself as an individual. According to Rudd, A’s refusal seems to be rooted in an “existential paralysis”, where his main focus is in keeping all his possibilities open by never fully embracing them. However, as Rudd notes, this attitude is developed through the aesthetic works in E/O. This is best expressed in the aesthetic paper Crop Rotation, where A has become fully conscious of his commitment to the value of freedom, and has chosen to embrace this life style. He shuns commitments and views them as boring, and is therefore fully devoted to values of freedom and the interesting. Accordingly, Rudd explains that A’s basic commitment is to be in control of his life. This control is, however, misunderstood in some sense by A. His control seems to only be directed at his life here-and-now, as his commitment is to never fully become something definite, but to constantly reinvent his own self by keeping all his possibilities open, as well as neglecting the influence his past have on his present and future life. In light of this, one could argue that A’s ironic commitment can serve as the background for a coherent self-directed narrative. His actions would to some extent be intelligible within that narrative, given his dedication of directing his actions towards the values of freedom and the interesting. However, as Rudd points out, this project of ironic commitment is self-contradictory and his narrative unity would only be in a minimal sense. Even though we could understand A’s actions within his narrative as meaningful, they would still not be embedded within a larger narrative that has a trajectory towards the future. This also draws on Rudd’s teleological understanding of the Kierkegaardian self, where Rudd understands A as refusing to acknowledge any significant

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64 Ibid. 74.
65 Ibid.
66 Rudd, Reason in Ethics: Revisited, 198.
telos that could unify and give meaning to his life. In wanting to maximise his freedom and pursuing the interesting, A is rejecting any telos that could tie him down. This is why judge Vilhelm views A as being in despair. His despair is, however, particular as opposed to the other accounts of despair given by Vilhelm. As mentioned before, A is conscious of his own despair, but he differs from the other aesthetic persons because he chooses to remain in it. Instead of acknowledging his despair and choosing the ethical, A is always avoiding the ethical responsibility of commitment and choosing himself. Vilhelm illustrates this by comparing A to a woman giving birth, yet “forever putting off the moment and remain constantly in pain.” In light of this, Rudd explains that A, and all other forms of aestheticism, is a way of losing, or failing to be oneself, i.e., to never fully develop the self that is one’s telos to be. As such, A’s need for narrative unity is only understood when viewing him as not living in accordance with his teleological nature. In having a narrative unified life, A should be more suited to live his life as progressing towards the realization of any underlying teloi.

2.2.3. General cases of aestheticism and serious aestheticism

Given that the main claims for A’s lack of narrative unity is evident, we should accordingly view Rudd’s discussion on the more general accounts of aestheticism. In giving a general description of the aesthetic life view, Vilhelm explains that the meaning or aim in such a life is the “enjoyment of life”. These cases are accordingly presented as the pursuit of beauty, wealth, social status, development of talent, and desire. Vilhelm’s description of these cases are not identical with A’s way of life, but they still share some similarities with him. According to Vilhelm, all these cases share the essential similarity of being in the form of immediacy and being in unconscious despair. However, the latter feature differs from the general accounts of aestheticism and A, since A is conscious of his own despair.

In light of Rudd’s arguments against the aesthetic life of A and his lack of narrative unity, it should follow that these general cases too lack narrative unity. However, as John Lippitt has pointed out, these cases of aestheticism cannot be distinguished from the ethical in terms of unity or coherence. All these cases of general aesthetic existence do after all have

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67 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 171.
69 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 172.
70 Kierkegaard, E/O, 493/SKS 3, 175.
some sense of unity by their being directed towards the fulfilment of some goal or aim. It would seem odd to claim otherwise, given that many people can live unified, coherent and meaningful lives, even though that life’s “meaning” or “aim” is not wholly ethical. The view that such aesthetes can have a unified life is even admitted by Vilhelm when he writes: “Now just as all these views have in common that they are aesthetic, so too they resemble one another in having a certain unity, a certain coherence, that is, one definite thing on which everything depends.” This definite thing is clearly the “enjoyment of life”, which serves as their goal or aim in life. Rudd’s response to this point is to underline Vilhelm’s insistence on such lives being cases of unconscious despair. As such, although having some degree of unity, they are best characterised as being simple-minded or naïve. They cannot self-reflectively understand that their lives are one of despair and accordingly choose the ethical, i.e., themselves. To be conscious of one’s own despair is to be able to choose the ethical, and ultimately oneself. Despair thus becomes a sort of a remedy in Vilhelm’s appeal to the ethical, as conscious despair allows one to become “transparent” to oneself, and accordingly accept and choose oneself. The aspect of transparency is essential to Vilhelm’s account of the ethical, as he writes about its importance in his letter to A: “The main difference, on which everything turns, is that the ethical individual is transparent to himself and does not live ‘out in the blue’ as the aesthetic individual.” This kind of transparency is not attainable for these kinds of aesthetic individuals, because they are all unconscious of their own despair. As such, Rudd’s understanding of them as “naïve” or “simple-minded” seems to be grounded in their inability to acknowledge their own despair. Vilhelm also seems to allude to something similar, i.e., naiveté or simple-mindedness, when he writes that these aesthetes lack the reflection of going beyond this immediacy. Although this may suit Rudd’s view, it is worth noting that it is a rather harsh judgement made against such cases of aestheticism, as well as a strong devaluation of aesthetic values.

Another point that Rudd makes against Lippitt’s objection is that these aesthetes lack the aspect of being responsible for their own narrative. Even though their lives may have some degree of unity and a narrative form, they still are not “consciously working to be the co-authors of their own narrative.” As Rudd explains, their unity does not depend on themselves working to accept and (partially) shape their own self, but on external or inherent

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73 Kierkegaard, E/O, 496/SKS 3, 178.
74 Rudd, Reason in Ethics: Revisited, 192.
75 Kierkegaard, E/O, 549/SKS 3, 246 (My italics)
76 Ibid. 501/SKS 3, 185.
77 This point will be further discussed in Part 4.
78 Rudd, Reason in Ethics: Revisited, 194.
factors. This is also an important point made by Vilhelm, as he explains that the aesthetic individual who pursues the aim of enjoying life “always posits a condition which is either outside the individual or in the individual but not posited by the individual himself.” 79 Examples of this are the aesthetic person whose enjoyment in life is based on beauty, which is posited inside the individual, or the aesthetic person who pursues the enjoyment of social status, which is posited outside the individual. Accordingly, what is essentially missing in their lives is a sense of autonomy and responsibility. This is more evident when we view Vilhelm’s talk of the ethical as a task, as he writes: “anyone who chooses himself ethically has himself as a task, not as a possibility, not as a plaything for his caprice to sport with.” 80 This underlines the importance of taking responsibility over your own self. Vilhelm continues by stating that the aesthetic person only sees certain aspects of his selfhood as accidental, and others being essential. As such, the aesthetic person does not assume any responsibility over his accidental features. In contrast, the ethical person makes the clear distinction between the accidental and essential in him, and assumes responsibility for it all. In making this distinction, the ethical person takes an essential responsibility over what he has excluded. 81 Vilhelm even writes that “the ethical individual might refer to himself as his own editor (…) fully aware of his editorial responsibility to himself”, which is notably similar to Rudd’s talk of narrative selves being their own “co-author”. 82 It is, however, important to note that although the general aesthetic individual may be deemed as being naïve in relation to his self-understanding and life view, he still has some continuity and unity in his life. We can also view this as a narrative unity if we view his pursuit of realizing his aim, i.e., the enjoyment of life, as genuinely meaningful to his life as a whole. In light of this, it might be better suited to deem the aesthetic individual’s unity as “inauthentic”, rather than viewing them as being naïve.

Another form of aestheticism that has so far not been mentioned is “serious aestheticism”. This kind of aesthetic seriousness is best expressed in the aesthetic papers The Seducer’s Diary and its author Johannes the Seducer. Serious aestheticism is, in contrast to A and the more general forms, a form of aestheticism where the individual chooses to commit oneself to a definite goal, without a commitment to the ethical. Moreover, this individual has both the reflection and deliberation to understand that his self contains various possibilities and talents, of which he can pursue, and sees that “it is impossible for everything to thrive

80 Ibid. 549/SKS 3, 245-6.
81 Ibid. 550-551/SKS 3, 247-248.
82 Ibid. 551/SKS 3, 248.
equally.” Rudd also explains that by making something definite of himself, the serious aesthete avoids the kind of despair that A suffers, and also the unconscious despair of general aestheticism, because of his consciously choosing what to be. The latter is therefore an example of how the individual himself posits the condition of realizing the meaning of his life, as opposed to the condition being posited outside or inside the individual. As such, the serious aesthete chooses to commit himself to one goal and to become something definite. However, as Rudd points out, this kind of aestheticism is still in trouble when it comes to narrative unity. Although the serious aesthete has the commitment that is necessary for taking responsibility over one’s definite character, thus having some degree of unity in his life, Rudd still views his commitment as being “somewhat unreal”. In questioning how the serious aesthete is to ground his commitment, Rudd proposes two answers: either the choice of commitment is grounded in one’s naturally propensity, or one chooses arbitrarily. It is important to remember that these reasons are aesthetic reasons, and, in accordance with Rudd’s view on the ethical, not chosen based on an underlying commitment to the Good. Given that serious aestheticism have a strong dimension of self-creation, which is expressed in their commitment and pursuit of a specific goal, the reason to commit to something based on one’s natural propensity shows how this self-creative aspect becomes more passive than active. On this, Rudd writes that the serious aesthete’s “active self-shaping rests, ultimately, on the passive acceptance of what one just is.” The second reason, to choose arbitrarily, is also problematic because the commitment can easily be cancelled. The choice of committing oneself to the pursuit of a specific goal is, in this case, groundless. However, in light of these problems, Rudd draws attention to the case of Johannes the Seducer and how he differs from the more general serious aesthete. According to Rudd, Johannes does not base his choice of commitment on one’s natural propensity or an arbitrary act of will, but on ‘aesthetic principles he has consciously chosen’. Johannes is therefore already different from the other cases of aestheticism, since he has an underlying condition that serve as the basis for all his commitments in life, which will give him a sense of unity. The problematic aspect of Johannes becomes apparent when considering these aesthetic principles. According to Rudd, if these principles are viewed as having a genuine and objective claim on Johannes, then he will accordingly cease to be an aesthete, in the Kierkegaardian sense. In understanding these

83 Ibid. 525/SKS 3, 216.
84 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 72.
85 Rudd, Reason in Ethics: Revisited, 195.
86 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 72.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid. 73.
principles as not being chosen arbitrarily, and his acting on the basis of these principles as defining the best and most fulfilling life, then they would seem to share the same values as the Good.\textsuperscript{89} However, if this is not the case, then Johannes would naturally not feel such a claim on him, and he could easily reject these principles at any moment, thus making his commitment to some extent “unreal”. It is also worth mentioning that these principles would be non-moral principles, and accordingly we could label them as ‘false values’. Rudd draws an analogy to a sincere and authentic Nazi. In this case, the Nazi would live in accordance with certain principles that unify his life and gives it meaning, even though those principles are in violation of objective moral values and principles.

2.3. Conclusion to part 2

Part 2 of my thesis was mainly concerned with \textit{E/O} and its relation to Rudd’s narrative claims made about Kierkegaardian selfhood. Following my account of \textit{E/O}, it was evident that the work presents the reader with two wholly different life views, in which the ethical stands as seemingly the more preferable one. This is grounded in the apparent despairing state of which is typical of aesthetic existence, as well as Rudd’s analysis of the latter. Rudd’s teleological understanding of selfhood is reasonably justified when applied to the view on selfhood as presented in \textit{E/O}, as it relates to the normative framework that is ethical existence and the inherent tension between one’s concretion and freedom. The latter point is particularly important as it shows how selfhood is constituted \textit{both} by our ability to accept who we are and create ourselves in light of this acceptance. Rudd’s narrative view on \textit{E/O} is primarily centred on the aesthetic life view, in which the aesthete \textit{A} stands as the focal point for his discussion. In light of Rudd’s analysis, it is evident that \textit{A} clearly lacks a stable personal identity, which accordingly can be formulated as a lack of narrative identity, given that we accept Rudd’s overall view on the temporality of selves. As such, Rudd is wholly justified when arguing for the apparent lack of narrative identity in \textit{A}’s aesthetic life. However, the same line of argument seems to run up against some problems when applied to more general cases of aestheticism, as well as serious aestheticism. Even though Rudd presents us with an adequate response to these problems, as well as referring to Vilhelm’s view as presented in \textit{E/O}, it seems that his narrative view \textit{cannot} encapsulate the whole aspect of selfhood in \textit{E/O}. However, the problems and critiques made against Rudd’s analysis of \textit{E/O} will be thoroughly discussed in part 4 of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
3. The Sickness unto Death and Narrative Identity

The previous section on Either/Or presented two different life views, the aesthetic and ethical self, that were in opposition to each other and where the ethical self was presumably more preferable than the aesthetic self. In light of Rudd’s analysis of the work and its relation to narrative identity, it would seem justified to claim that ethical selfhood is the “right way to go”, as opposed to the more immediate and despairing aesthetic self. However, as this section will discuss, Kierkegaard’s late work The Sickness unto Death presents us with a much more detailed and nuanced view on selfhood, and especially the role of despair. The discussion and analysis of selfhood in SUD is far more academic in style, as opposed to E/O’s various essays and its discursive form, and can be viewed as presenting an ontology of selfhood. Despite this, SUD’s discussion on selfhood is still very complicated and its overall project can be understood as being a negative analysis of selfhood. That is because Anti-Climacus’ main focus is more directed at the phenomenon of despair and its relation to selfhood. As such, the whole of Part One in SUD discusses the various ways of how the self can be in despair. It is not until Part Two that we are presented with the “remedy” of how one is to escape despair and fully become a self. Similar to his view on E/O, Rudd maintains the position that SUD also presents us with a conception of selfhood that is compatible with his view on narrative identity. However, it is important to note that the view on selfhood that is presented in SUD is far more comprehensive and, to some extent, quite different from the view on selfhood that is presented in E/O. Albeit this, Rudd still maintains that Anti-Climacus’ view on selfhood contains aspects that are compatible with his view on narrative identity, many of which are similar to the claims he made about E/O. Following this, I will accordingly divide this part into two main chapters. Chapter 3.1 gives an account of SUD and its discussion on selfhood and despair, and Chapter 3.2 discusses how Rudd’s conception of selfhood and narrative identity can be applied to SUD.

Regarding my account and understanding of selfhood as presented in SUD, an important point to stress is that my focus will primarily be on Part One, The Sickness unto Death is Despair. Part Two of SUD, Despair is Sin, will not receive as much attention due to its religious

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90 I will use the abbreviation SUD from now on. The Danish edition will be referenced from sks.dk, where SUD is labelled as 11, 115 – 242. Moreover, I will also refer to the work’s author as Anti-Climacus, which is its pseudonymous author.

character. This decision is grounded in the goal to incorporate and understand Kierkegaard’s thoughts on selfhood and identity in a contemporary setting. Presumably, many readers, who are not religious, would feel inclined to reject any strong claims made about selfhood that is grounded in the doctrines of Christianity. Moreover, as was mentioned in part 2, Rudd also makes this move by using a “more metaphysical modest understanding of the Good than Kierkegaard’s ultimate one”, which is God. In addition, it is worth noticing that Anti-Climacus also makes a clear distinction between the “types” of selves that are discussed in SUD’s two parts. In the initial pages of Part Two, Anti-Climacus explains that Part One was concerned with the self within the categories of “the human self”, while Part Two deals with how the self takes on “a new quality and specification”, which can be called a “theological self” or “a self directly before God.” For these reasons, I believe that downplaying the religious side of SUD makes it possible to show Kierkegaard’s relevance for a wider set of philosophical questions and interests.

3.1. The Sickness unto Death, Selfhood, and Despair

In this chapter, I hope to account for the complex analysis of selfhood that Anti-Climacus presents in SUD. As mentioned in the introduction to this part, the analysis of selfhood that Anti-Climacus offers us can be viewed as primarily a negative one. That is, selfhood is, throughout Part One of SUD, described as being in various states of despair. In similarity with Judge Vilhelm, Anti-Climacus also views despair as a state in which one never “truly himself”. This is also better understood when we understand Kierkegaardian selves as essentially teleological, as Rudd proposes. As such, despair becomes a state in which one is not living in accordance with his or her telos. However, in giving us this “negative picture” of selfhood, Anti-Climacus underlines the most salient aspects that pertain to selfhood. As such, I would propose that we view the method of Anti-Climacus as such: In becoming aware of how and why a self is in despair, we should recognize the necessary requirements that are needed to avoid a state of despair and accordingly “fully” become ourselves. The following chapter will therefore account for Anti-Climacus’ analysis of selfhood and its relation to the state of despair.

92 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 46.
93 Kierkegaard, SUD, 111/SKS 11, 193
3.1.1. The synthesis – selfhood as achievement, and despair as imbalance

The first important aspect of the Anti-Climacan self is that it is presented as the achievement of a synthesis that is a human being. To understand what this entails, I present the much-quoted and complex passage from the first chapter in *SUD*. The passage gives a seemingly ontological explanation of what a human being is, and the relation a human being has with the self. The passage goes as follows:

The human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relation to itself. The self is not the relation, but the relation’s relating 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. A synthesis is a relation between two terms. Looked at in this way a human being is not yet a self.\(^{94}\)

In presenting this ontology of selfhood, Anti-Climacus differentiates between a human being and spirit, or self. The important aspect of this differentiation is that the synthesis that a human being is qualified as, is not a self. As John J. Davenport points out, in claiming that the synthesis of which a human being consists of, is not a self, Anti-Climacus rejects both Cartesian substance dualism and Aristotelian hylomorphism.\(^{95}\) Even though a human being is a synthesis of polar opposites, which can be viewed as mind-body synthesis, the aspect of selfhood must be viewed as a possibility that belongs to a human being. Selfhood is therefore not something that exists from the outset, already constituted by virtue of our dualistic nature. Selfhood is a possibility that must be actualized. Accordingly, Anti-Climacus writes, “every human being is the psycho-physical synthesis planned (anlagt) as spirit.”\(^{96}\) As such, selfhood becomes an achievement, rather than a pre-conditioned given. This is aspect of selfhood is further expressed when Anti-Climacus states that it is our task to become ourselves.\(^{97}\) Given the ontological structure presented to us in *SUD*, we must view the synthesis of mind and body as a “first-order relation”, which undergoes a self-relational process that will lead it to selfhood. The self thus becomes a second-order relation involving the first-order relation, i.e., the synthesis.\(^{98}\) This second-order relation is therefore a relation between the self and the human being. That is why Anti-Climacus states that the self is “a relation that relates to itself”. However, Anti-Climacus also explains that the self relates to something else which has established the whole relation. This “something” is, according to Anti-Climacus, God, and to

\(^{94}\) Ibid. 43/SKS 11, 129.


\(^{96}\) Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 74/SKS 11, 158.

\(^{97}\) Ibid. 59/SKS 11, 146.

\(^{98}\) Davenport, *Selfhood and ‘Spirit’*, 235
truly achieve selfhood, we must accordingly relate ourselves to this power. To simplify this, I have sketched out a suggestion of how the structure may look.  

Looking deeper into the structure given to us by Anti-Climacus, we can identify the polar opposites that belong to the synthesis as various aspects of the first-order relation, i.e., the mind-body relation. As Anti-Climacus stated, these basic polar opposites are the finite/infinite, necessity/possibility (freedom), and the temporal/eternal. So, in his initial discussion about despair, Anti-Climacus uses these oppositions to show how a human being, who has not yet achieved full selfhood, relates to these various polarities. In discussing despair that pertains to the oppositions in the synthesis, Anti-Climacus tries to illustrate how the occurrence of despair is connected to an imbalance in the synthesis, i.e., when there is a misrelation between the polar opposites.

Alastair Hannay writes in the introduction of SUD that Anti-Climacus’ account of despair consists of two principal components: (i) the oppositions that the synthesis consists of, and (ii) the self’s becoming more self-conscious of it’s being in despair. Accordingly, the first principal component of despair is centred on how one relates to the synthesis and its polar opposites. Anti-Climacus’s description of this kind of despair is centred on how the various oppositions is given too much “weight”. The despair that occurs when “infinitude”

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99 Much based upon the model presented in Davenport, *Selfhood and 'Spirit*', 235.

100 Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 20-24. The second principal component will be discussed in chapter 3.1.3. as it is far too extensive to include it within the discussion of the first component.
has primacy over its opposition “finitude” is a state of despair where the self is given over to imagination. As a result, such a self lacks the confining factor of finitude, which can serve as a counterweight and make the self more concrete and specific. In contrast, when a self has too much finitude, the self becomes too “narrow”, and is lost in the multitude of other selves. This kind of despair is similar to Heidegger’s concept of “das Man”. As Anti-Climacus explains: “such a person forgets himself (…) finds being himself too risky, finds it much easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, along with the crowd.”101 Accordingly, regarding these two aspects of the synthesis, Anti-Climacus explains that “the self is a synthesis in which the finite is the confining factor, the infinite the expanding factor.”102

To understand these oppositions better, we can look at two other oppositions within the synthesis: possibility and necessity. Like infinitude/finitude, despair occurs when one of the polarities is lacking in the other. As such, possibility’s despair is to lack necessity, and vice versa. To lack necessity is, according to Anti-Climacus, to only see possibilities, while never actualizing them. This is also due to the person’s inability to recognize his or her limits, or as Anti-Climacus writes: “what is really missing is the strength to obey, to yield to the necessary in one’s self.”103 This is very similar to infinitude, because it underlines our failure in losing ourselves in the abstract. In contrast, to lack possibility, which is necessity’s despair, is to view everything as being out of one’s own control. Anti-Climacus explains that to lack possibility means that “everything has become trivial”.104

Accordingly, all these aspects illustrate how one must balance the confining and definite aspects of one’s own self, which can also be regarded as one’s facticity, with the aspects pertaining to one’s imagination and volition. One cannot be lost in imagining that everything is under one’s own control and freedom, but neither can one let one’s facticity govern what is possible. There must be a balance, or one ends up in a state of despair. Moreover, Anti-Climacus explains that the synthesis is not the imbalance, but the possibility of the imbalance lies in the synthesis.105 As such, despair can be viewed as the result of an imbalanced self-relation to the first-order relation that is the synthesis. This underlines the importance of understanding how despair is wholly internal, and not external. Anti-Climacus explains that “despair lies in the person himself”.106 Accordingly, despair cannot be some external misfortune that causes us to despair. Despair pertains our inability to relate properly

101 Ibid. 64/SKS 11, 149.
102 Ibid. 60/SKS 11, 146.
103 Ibid. 66/SKS 11, 152.
104 Ibid. 70/SKS 11, 155.
105 Ibid. 45/SKS 11, 131.
106 Ibid. 46/SKS 11, 132.
to the relation that is the synthesis, and its constitutive opposites. That is why Anti-Climacus also states that “every time the imbalance manifests itself, and every moment it exists, one must go back to the relation.”

3.1.2. Temporality in *The Sickness unto Death: the temporal and the eternal*

The last set of polarities in the synthesis, the eternal and temporal, is more centred on the second principal component of despair, i.e., the self’s becoming more self-conscious of it being in despair. However, before I begin my account of this second component of despair, I think it is best that we have an adequate understanding of what Anti-Climacus means when using the concepts “the eternal” and “the temporal”. The temporal represents the temporal dimension we occupy and understand as human beings. If we are to use Rudd’s narrative view, we could say that the temporal represents the narrative in which we belong/are its co-author. In contrast, Anti-Climacus’ concept of “the eternal” is related to the possibility of *eschatological judgement*, which is consistent with the religious project of Anti-Climacus throughout *SUD*, and how the self-referential aspect of becoming a self is related to being present in time. On eschatological judgment, what the self comes into contact with in its engagement with the eternal is eternity’s judgement of you as a self, which collects the totality of a life into a single object of assessment:

> And when the hour-glass has run out, the hour-glass of temporality, when the worldly tumult is silenced (...) eternity asks you, and every one of these millions of millions, just one thing: whether you have lived in despair or not.

In this moment of judgment one is either in despair, or has been saved from despair. If the former, then “eternity does not acknowledge you (...) it knows you as you are known, it manacles you to your self in despair.”

However, if the latter, then you are accordingly not judged as being in despair. As such, the essential feature of this eschatological judgment is not a judgment at the end of your life, “when the hour-glass has run out”. It all depends upon the *present moment*. The only concerning question with regards to despair is whether or not I am in despair now.

Accordingly, as P. Stokes suggests in his book *The Naked Self*, we can view the Anti-Climacan self as “simultaneously relating itself to what is temporal – the diachronically

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107 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
extended or ‘narrative’ self – and the eternal." Following this, we must view the self-referential process of becoming a self as becoming conscious of this aspect, i.e., the eternal. Stokes explains this experience as follows:

Yet only in relation to the eternal, understood as final judgment over the whole of my life, does the past appear as the actuality for which I am responsible, the future as the stage for possibilities which I am to actualize, and the present as the place where I relate to the whole thing. Stokes’ understanding of our experience of the eternal is also heavily influenced by Kierkegaard’s concept of “the Moment” (Øjeblikket) in his earlier work The Concept of Anxiety, where the Moment is understood as “the point where time and eternity intersect.” The idea of becoming conscious of the eternal, where one “transcends” one’s temporal dimension, entails that we are more self-aware/conscious of the task or goal that is selfhood. As will be shown in the following paragraph, to become self-conscious is therefore an essential aspect of achieving selfhood, which in turn entails that one is conscious of the eternal in you as spirit, i.e., a self.

3.1.3. The process of becoming a self – self-consciousness and despair

The process of becoming a self and the state of despair is closely related to the concept of consciousness, or more specific: self-consciousness. This is reflected in one of Anti-Climacus’ paragraphs, when he discusses the various forms of despair:

Despair must be considered under the aspect of consciousness; it is whether or not despair is conscious that qualitatively distinguishes one form of despair form another (...) consciousness is the decisive factor. In general, what is decisive with regard to the self is consciousness, that is to say, self-consciousness. The more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self.

The emphasis on will is reflected in the view that selfhood is brought about by the self’s autonomous action of relating to itself. As such, Anti-Climacus also states that “the self is freedom”. This view is therefore in opposition with the idea that there exists a pre-established self. In contrast to this idea, Anti-Climacus seems to propose that there exists a pre-established potential for selfhood. In discussing the origins of despair, Anti-Climacus writes how God “lets go” of the relation that is spirit, i.e., the self. Davenport gives an excellent summarization of how we are to view this point from Anti-Climacus:

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111 P. Stokes, The Naked Self, 162.
112 Ibid. 163.
114 Kierkegaard, SUD, 59/SKS 11, 145.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid. 46/SKS 11, 132.
(...) spirit always freely assumes a posture of will; it is as if God creates the potential for self by allowing a human animal to become free in relation to its given psychological and physical features, to make of them an identity conditioned but not determined by this givenness.\textsuperscript{117}

Following this, the concept of freedom and will is evidently important aspects in the Anti-Climacan self. However, the aspect of consciousness is of more concern, since it emphasises both our ability to become a self and to fall in despair. Accordingly, the following paragraphs will focus on the various forms of despair that is a result of one becoming more self-conscious.

As stated earlier, the second principal component of Anti-Climacus’ analysis of despair is: the self’s becoming more self-conscious of it being in despair. Accordingly, when Anti-Climacus is discussing the various forms of despair, he distinguishes between essentially two forms of conscious despair: in despair not wanting to be oneself, or in despair wanting to be oneself. Even though these are the most essential forms of despair, Anti-Climacus also explains that one can be unconscious of being in despair, which is described as “the despair that is ignorant of being despair.”\textsuperscript{118} The person who is ignorant of being in despair is also ignorant of having a self, or being conscious of oneself as spirit. As such, Anti-Climacus explains that such a person lives in ‘the categories of sensation’, and suffers from “spiritlessness”.\textsuperscript{119} However, to be conscious of one’s state as being in despair is to have “a true conception of what despair is”, and to have “clarity about oneself”.\textsuperscript{120} Moreover, the more conscious one is of being in despair, the more intense the despair.\textsuperscript{121} As such, there is a “dialectic” at work in the various forms of despair, where the rising of self-consciousness always leads to a new and more intense form of despair. The previous accounted forms of despair that was related to the two oppositions within the synthesis, i.e., the finite/infinite, and possibility/necessity, were all cases of how one can despair when of the polarities is given too much weight or value. The cases of despair that pertain to the rising of self-consciousness are more concerned with how a human being becomes more conscious of having a self and something of the eternal in it, and how various forms of despair can arise from this self-conscious experience. I will now present a model that, hopefully, will help the reader get a better understanding of Anti-Climacus’ view on despair. The model is divided into four main parts, where each part represent the dialectical progression of self-consciousness and its

\textsuperscript{117} Davenport, \textit{Selfhood and ‘Spirit’}, 238.
\textsuperscript{118} Kierkegaard, \textit{SUD}, 73/SKS 11, 157.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid. 74-75/SKS 11, 158-160.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.78/SKS 11, 162.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid. 72/SKS 11, 157.
relation to despair, e.g., (1) represents self-consciousness of the self and its state of being in despair at its lowest. Following this, the model is presented as such:  

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<td>The despair that is conscious of being despair, which is therefore conscious of having a self in which there is something eternal.</td>
<td>In despair not wanting to be oneself – The despair of weakness</td>
<td>In despair wanting to be oneself – Defiance</td>
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<tr>
<td>The despair that is ignorant of being despair, or the despairing ignorance of having a self and an eternal self.</td>
<td>Despair over the earthly or over something earthly</td>
<td>Despair of the eternal or over oneself</td>
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Model 2.

Given the model’s structure, I will now account for the various forms of conscious despair, and try to give an accurate picture of how these forms of despair stand in relation to the becoming more conscious of oneself, and accordingly, becoming “more” oneself.

The first kind of conscious despair is: in despair not wanting to be oneself. This kind of despair can also be divided into two forms: despair over the earthly or over something earthly (2), and despair of the eternal or over oneself (3). To despair over the earthly or over something earthly is, according to Anti-Climacus, “pure immediacy, or immediacy with some quantitative reflection.” In relation to the temporal and eternal, Anti-Climacus writes:

The immediate person (in so far as immediacy can occur entirely without reflection) is specifiable only as soul, his self and he himself a something included in the scope of the temporal and the worldly, in immediate continuity with the Other, and it presents only an illusory appearance of having something eternal in it.

The occurrence of despair, as experienced by the immediate person (without some reflection), is one of misfortune. It is experienced as something coming from the outside world, and if the “pain” goes away, then immediacy returns. But if the despair remains, then the immediate person avoids his or her suffering by “donning on a new coat”, by becoming someone else. As Anti-Climacus writes: “the immediate person doesn’t know himself; he quite literally only

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122 Model based upon the one given in: Kresten Nordentoft, Kierkegaards Psykologi, (København: Hans Reitzels Forlag a/s, 1995), 279. I will use the numeration (as presented in the model) of various forms of conscious despair in the subsequent paragraphs.

123 Kierkegaard, SUD, 80/SKS 11, 165.

124 Ibid. 81/SKS 11, 165-166.
knows himself by his coat, he knows what it is to have a self (...) only in externals.” An example of this could be cases of “extreme makeover” where a person genuinely thinks he has changed himself by virtue of changing the way he looks. That is, his self-perception is wholly determined by externalities. However, this kind of immediacy is without some reflection. When immediacy contains some reflection, the immediate person, accordingly, has more consciousness of his own self and his state being one of despair. As the former kind of immediacy can be described as a form of passivity, i.e., a succumbing to external pressure, reflective immediacy can be viewed as active. In describing this case of despair, Anti-Climacus presents us with a person who is somewhat more conscious of his own self, where he gradually begins to have an understanding of his self as “essentially different from the external world.” That is, his self-conception is not wholly determined by externalities, which was the case of the immediate person without some reflection. However, in this moment of self-reflection, the person stumbles upon one difficulty that pertains to the compositions of his self, “the self’s necessity.” He is disgusted by this and despairs over it. But instead of falling into pure immediacy and passivity, he makes an effort to protect his self. Because of his reflective awareness of his own self, the idea of becoming someone else does not occur to him, but he is still in despair of not wanting to be oneself. That is, instead of becoming someone else, he “hides” his true self, with its difficulties. The following result from this “protection” is described by Anti-Climacus as such:

He turns completely away from the inward direction, the path he should have followed in order truly to become a self. The whole question of the self in a deeper sense becomes a kind of false door in the background of his soul, with nothing behind it. He takes possession of what he, in his language, he calls his self, that is to say, whatever aptitudes, talent, etc. he may have been given, all this he takes possession of but in the outward direction of what is called ‘life’, real life, active life.

An example of this kind of despair could be the character Jamie Lannister from Game of Thrones. He is initially portrayed as a “bad-guy” in the book, but it would seem that he also is deeply aware of certain virtuous qualities that pertain to his self. Even though he is still a “bad guy”, to some extent, he decides to “hide” his more virtuous qualities and live on as if this aspect isn’t there. This kind of despair is evidently a form of not wanting to be oneself, and stands in relation to becoming more self-conscious. The next form of despair, which is still within the category of “not wanting to be oneself”, is a dialectical result of this latter form.

125 Ibid. 84/SKS 11, 168.
126 Ibid. 85/SKS 11, 169.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid. 86-87/SKS 11, 171.
This next form is described as “despair of the eternal or over oneself” (3), and illustrates how the aforementioned person now becomes more self-conscious of his despair. The former cases of despair are described by Anti-Climacus as being “the despair of weakness”. The “weakness” is related to the desparer’s inability to be fully conscious of and acknowledge his or her true self. However, this next form, i.e., to despair of the eternal or over oneself, implies a higher conscious awareness than the previous forms. Such a despairing person knows that he or she has a self, and that there is something eternal in it. However, they are unable to forget their previous weakness, and despair over this weakness. In not being able to forget and humble himself under this weakness, the person ends up despising himself. The reactive response to this is what Anti-Climacus calls being “reserved” (innesluttethed). Instead of confronting his own despair, where the “despair is held open”, which would lead him out of his despair, he decides not to acknowledge his own self, and keeps it locked up in reserve. He does not despair over the earthly or something earthly, but over his very own self, and the eternal that is recognized to be in it. In contrast to “reflective immediacy”, as described above, “reserve” is concerned with the self as a whole, and not some specific quality. This kind of despair could be represented through people who are conscious of who they are, as selves, but does not want to disclose it publically. That is, in realizing how one is as a self, and accordingly perceives it as something “negative”, the person decides to keep it hidden from everyone else. As such, one could describe the kind of despair as despair over the “colour” of the self, whereas ‘reflective immediacy’ is despair over a ‘crack’ in the self. This also shows how the desparer, who is in reserve, has stronger conscious awareness of his own self in contrast to the “reflective immediate desparer”. However, as Anti-Climacus states, this kind of despair is “a rather rare occurrence”, and the intensification of such despair can lead to two scenarios: (i) the “hidden” self will break through its “outward disguise”, and the person will “fling himself out into life”, where he will continue to despair over the self he cannot forget and fall into immediacy. Or, (ii) he will continue to be reserved, even though his conscious awareness of his despair will heighten, thus leading him (dialectically) into the fourth main form of despair: defiance (4).

The dialectical movement from “in despair not wanting to be oneself” and “in despair wanting to be oneself” is centred on the despairing person’s wanting to create himself, thus

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129 Ibid. 80/SK 11, 165.
130 Ibid. 92/SK 11, 176.
131 Ibid. 94/SK 11, 177.
132 Ibid. 93/SK 11, 177.
133 Ibid. 97/SK 11, 180.
134 Ibid.
wanting to be “the most abstract form of the self.” This abstract form of the self is a result of the despairer being conscious of an infinite self, which can be regarded as the opposition to his concrete self. The latter signifies his necessity and limits, and while he does recognize this concreteness, he still wants to have full control over the power to create a self in his own image. To understand this better, it is important to remember what was earlier stated about how the self is constituted and its actualization as a task. To achieve selfhood, according to Anti-Climacus, one must recognize that a “power”, or God, has established one’s potentiality. Moreover, Anti-Climacus also stresses that we must view this potential as a task. The despairer who wants to be himself stands in a conscious opposition to these conditions laid down by Anti-Climacus. He wants to “sever the self from any relation to the power which has established it”, and “does not want to see his task in his given self”. That is why this form of despair is understood as defiance. In light of this, Anti-Climacus continues by differentiating between two kinds of “wanting in despair to be oneself”: (i) an active despairing self, and (ii) a passive despairing self.

The active despairing self is, according to Anti-Climacus, “constantly relating to itself only experimentally.” What this entails is that one is “experimentally” trying to create a self in his or her own fashion. Such a person wants to be solely responsible and in control of “developing itself, being itself, and have its own way of understanding itself.” However, this self is only “hypothetical”, according to Anti-Climacus, because the creator of such a self can easily start all over again. This point is excellently illustrated by Anti-Climacus when he writes: “Consequently, the despairing self is forever building only castles in the air (...) just when it seems on the point of having the building finished, at a whim it can dissolve the whole thing into nothing.” A good example of this would be Peer Gynt and how he constantly tries to “reinvent” himself, either by being a merchant in Morocco, prophet in the Bedouin dessert, or the emperor of a madhouse. Here, Peer Gynt shows us how he is always reinventing himself by taking up various roles, or “selves”. He is never wholly committed to being himself, and is rather more interested in wanting to find the “right” self. As such, he can be viewed as representing a self that wants to be its own creator, and how this self-created self is “groundless” and can quickly dissolve.

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135 Ibid. 99/SKS 11, 182.
136 Kierkegaard, SUD, 59 and 99/SKS 11, 146 and 182.
137 Ibid. 99/SKS 11, 182
138 Ibid. 100/SKS 11, 182.
139 Ibid. 101/SKS 11, 183.
140 Ibid. 100-101/SKS 11, 183.
In contrast to the active despairing self, is the passive self, who in its defiance wants to be himself *in spite* of a basic fault that is pertaining to his own selfhood. Although the term “passive self” is used appropriately in relation to its counterpart “active self”, the original Danish term is still lost in the English translation. In Danish, the passive self is the “lidende selv”, i.e., the *suffering* self. The use of *suffering* is much more appropriate in relation to the character of this kind of despair. This kind of despair is similar to “despair over something earthly”, where the despairing person becomes consciously aware of some “difficulty”. However, instead of not wanting to be this self, the suffering despairing person wants to be himself in spite of this fault. He cannot reject it, because “this far his experimental abilities do not reach, not even his ability to abstract”, and he will not have hope in the possibility of its removal either.\(^{141}\) Instead, he wants to be himself in spite of it, “he wants to spite or defy all existence and be himself with it.”\(^{142}\) A good example of this kind of despair would be William Shakespear’s Richard III. Richard, who is a hunchback, *suffers* from this deformity and is something he cannot remove by hiding or “abstraction”. Others also perceive him as “evil” or bad natured. As a result of this, Richard decides to be a self *as* this deformed evil character. This is best expressed when Richard states “since I cannot prove a lover (…) I am determined to prove a villain.”\(^{143}\) It is also worth noting that Kierkegaard himself uses Richard III as an example when describing this form of despair, i.e., defiance, which is visible both in *SUD* and *Fear and Trembling*.\(^ {144}\) Conversely, if Richard III is to avoid this kind of despair, he must accept this difficulty as an essential aspect of his own selfhood, and not portray himself as *only* being this difficulty.

In light of this account of the discussion of despair in *SUD*, the initial impression would naturally be that it is an account of what the self, according to Anti-Climacus, is *not*. This is right, considering despair is exactly the opposite of selfhood. However, through the negative picture of selfhood given by Anti-Climacus, there are still some fundamental characteristics that pertain to what a self essentially is. It is still important to remember that Anti-Climacus gives us a clear-cut formula for how the self, ultimately, is truly itself and has annihilated the possibility of despair. This formula is, as mentioned earlier, presented as such: “in relating to itself and in wanting to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power that

\(^{141}\) Ibid. 101/SKS 11, 184.
\(^{142}\) Ibid 102/SKS 11, 185.
\(^{144}\) Nordentoft, *Kierkegaards Psykologi*, 390-391.
established it.”145 This has been implicit (negatively stated) throughout the various forms of despair, and is reflected in the view that all despair can ultimately be reduced to the form of “to despair over oneself, in despair not wanting to be oneself”.146 Notwithstanding Anti-Climacus’ ultimate answer to avoid despair, which is to have faith, thus being conscious of being before God, his view on selfhood still contains aspects that are not necessarily theological in nature. One of these aspects is that selfhood is a task, or a goal, which must be achieved. This is evident when he writes: “the self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude, which relates to itself, whose task is to become itself.”147 Moreover, Anti-Climacan selfhood also consists of being self-conscious of oneself, which is represented in his discussion of “the relation relating to itself”, and when his emphasis of “inward direction” as the path to “truly become a self”.148 However, this self-relational aspect of selfhood must also be directed outwards, to the world/other selves. The despair of not properly relating to the world and other selves is represented as being reserved. As such, Anti-Climacan selfhood involves a strong aspect of self-awareness, or self-consciousness, where one must know oneself as different from one’s externals, without ending up in solipsism. One could view it as an affirmation of one’s singularity. In being aware of this aspect of oneself, one is also conscious of one’s factual/given features and of our freedom to shape ourselves in light of this facticity. Finally, this is done continually, which is reflected in our relation to the temporal and eternal, notwithstanding the possibility of eschatological judgment. To conclude, we can view the Anti-Climacan self as a pre-established task, which must be continually work towards through conscious self-relation. In light of this, we now turn to Rudd’s narrative approach and how this view on selfhood can be interpreted as an expression of narrative identity.

3.2. **Anthony Rudd, narrative, and The Sickness unto Death**

In Part 2, the discussion about narrative identity was mainly concerned with E/O, where the focus on narrative was represented in Judge Vilhelm’s focus on ‘choosing the ethical’, which, according to Rudd, is to have a narrative conception of your own self. In trying to account for how the narrative position relates to SUD and the Anti-Climacan self, I will rely on many of the same concepts and ideas that Rudd used to elicit the notion of narrative selfhood in his analysis of E/O. Accordingly, I will in this chapter try to apply Rudd’s narrative view of

145 Kierkegaard, *SUD*, 44/SKS 11, 133.
146 Ibid. 50/SKS 11, 135-136.
147 Ibid. 59/SKS 11, 146. My italics.
148 Ibid. 86/SKS 11, 171.
Kierkegaardian selfhood to the view presented in SUD. However, it is important to note that Rudd also has some explicit claims and arguments about Anti-Climacan selfhood. In light of this, I will therefore begin by showing how Rudd’s teleological understanding of selfhood is applicable to SUD, which is grounded in the idea that selfhood is a task. Following this, I will look how Rudd views the temporality of Anti-Climacan selves, and how this is connected to his narrative view. This will include Rudd’s understanding of the concept eternity/the eternal, which can be viewed as containing strong similarities with his narrative understanding of selfhood.

3.2.1. Anti-Climacan selves are teleological

In the previous part of my thesis, it was evident that Vilhelm’s understanding of the self contained strong teleological aspects. These aspects were also better elicited when we viewed Rudd’s analysis and understanding of selfhood in E/O. Continuing with Rudd’s teleological view on selfhood, it is evident this view can also be applied to Anti-Climacan selfhood. In eliciting the teleological dimension in SUD, Rudd notices that there is an “inherent dynamism about the self” in Anti-Climacus’ account of selfhood.149 This “inherent dynamism” is represented through the synthesis and the self-relational process of becoming a self.

Accordingly, Rudd states that there are two important features about this dynamism: (i) the self becomes an activity of constituting itself as a self, and (ii) the self is the product of a self-conscious activity of synthesis.150 Following this view, it is important to note that the Anti-Climacan self becomes both activity and product. The Anti-Climacan self is therefore an activity and product of self-constitution, which is related to the task of becoming oneself. Thus, Self-constitution is a teleological activity of Anti-Climacan selves. In light of this, it is worth considering Rudd’s understanding of the synthesis in Anti-Climacan selves, and its constitutive opposites. In doing so, this will also help us understand better Anti-Climacus’ account of selfhood.

The oppositions that constitute the synthesis are finitude/infinitude, necessity/possibility (freedom), and temporality/eternity. In light of these oppositions, Rudd explains that there are three different ways of formulating one basic polarity.151 The first formulation states that one can formulate these oppositional sets as being contractive, i.e., the finite, necessary and temporal, and expansive, i.e., the infinite, possible and eternal. The

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149 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 41.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
second formulation understands these sets as being expressive of our limitations, or rootedness, which Rudd calls “immanence”, and our ability to transcend these limitations, which he accordingly calls “transcendence”. The third formulation is grounded upon the second formulation, and views them as being expressive of our “self-acceptance” and “self-shaping”. These concepts were also used in Rudd’s analysis of E/O, but because of Anti-Climacus’ more extensive and specific account of selfhood, the concepts gain more qualification. On the importance of “self-acceptance” and “self-shaping” in SUD, Rudd writes:

That we are finite, limited beings, means that there are things about us that we just have to accept as given. But that we have the capacity for self-transcendence means that we are not wholly given beings; we have the power to step back from and shape ourselves. In rejecting the radical alternatives that I have used Schopenhauer and Sartre to exemplify, Kierkegaard sees the self as a ‘synthesis’ of immanence and transcendence. So for Kierkegaard, there is something importantly right about both the self-acceptance and the self-shaping view. Following this, we can therefore say that there exists an inherent tension in our synthesis, and we must accordingly try to balance this tension. We, i.e., our selves, are not something simply given, nor something we can create ex nihilo, but “something that exists in and through the shaping of itself and in constantly negotiating the limits of what it can and cannot alter.” That is, we must actively balance out this tension, which can be viewed as the self-relational aspect, which is described as “the self is a relation that relates to itself” in SUD. Furthermore, this is only possible if we are self-conscious about ourselves. As such, it becomes clear that all the various kinds and forms of despair are a result of our “failure” in being self-conscious of the synthesis, and failing to actively balancing the inherent tension within that synthesis. That is why Anti-Climacus states that when “the imbalance manifests itself, and every moment it exists, one must go back to the relation.”

The awareness of and active balancing out this tension in our own self is about becoming oneself. That is why Anti-Climacus stresses this “becoming” as our task, e.g., “the self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude, which relates to itself, whose task is to become itself.” The task of “becoming oneself” could therefore be regarded as our telos. All forms of despair is, in contrast, cases of “not wanting to be oneself”, which can therefore be viewed as a state of being where we are in opposition to our telos of becoming ourselves.

152 Ibid.
153 Ibid. 42.
154 Ibid. 43.
155 Kierkegaard, SUD, 43/SKS 11, 129
156 Ibid. 46/SKS 11, 132.
157 Ibid. 59/SKS 11, 146. My italics.
However, as Rudd points out, we cannot realize this telos on our own. Anti-Climacus explains that the self is a relation, “which relates to itself, and in relating to itself relates to something else.” As explained earlier, this “something else” is, according to Anti-Climacus, God. The realization of our telos, which is to become ourselves, is only possible when we are conscious of God as the one who established the potential for selfhood. However, as mentioned before, both Rudd and I have some reservations against this theological view on selfhood, where Rudd has a more “metaphysically modest” view on this aspect of Anti-Climacan selfhood, as he substitutes God with “the Good”. This was shown in Part 2., where Rudd’s platonic Good was well suitable to Judge Vilhelm’s ethical position. It was also shown that Rudd views the Kierkegaardian self as structured by a threefold teleology, which was presented as: (i) to become ourselves – (ii) relating to particular goals/projects and relationships – (iii) underlying commitment to the Good. Rudd also explained that our telos in the third sense, the underlying commitment to the Good, was our most fundamental telos. Although Rudd’s idea of the Good, as our most fundamental telos, suits the Anti-Climacan argument of ultimately relating oneself to something absolute and universal (God), the Good still loses an important metaphysical aspect that it cannot possess. What is lost is the Good’s status as being the “establisher” of our potential for selfhood. This aspect is clearly evident in Anti-Climacus’ view on God and its relation to selfhood. In contrast, it is more difficult to imagine that the Good, as an objective, normative standard, is something that has established this potentiality. Notwithstanding Rudd’s acknowledgment of the concept being more metaphysically modest, it is still worth considering the Good’s applicability within the context of SUD. By removing the strong theological aspects of selfhood, we are more committed to a non-theistic understanding. Anti-Climacus explains that an analysis of the self, without any religious commitments, must be viewed as “the human self”. Moreover, this “human self” has “humanity as its standard of measurement”, and can therefore be viewed as more suitable to a moral/ethical approach. In being committed to the Good we accordingly attain an objective and normative standard, which Rudd explains is something “we need to relate in order to achieve harmony within ourselves.” Accordingly, it seems justifiable to view the Good as our fundamental telos, i.e., as our “standard of measurement”, if we understand the Anti-Climacan self as a “human self”.

158 Ibid. 43/SKS 11, 130.
159 Ibid. 111/SKS 11, 193.
160 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 46.
Although Rudd’s understanding of the Good can be applied to \textit{SUD}’s context, our \textit{telos} in the second sense is not as explicit in Anti-Climacus’ account of selfhood as it was in \textit{E/O}. That is, the aspect of being directed towards particular projects and relationships is not as prevalent in \textit{SUD}, where selfhood is mostly described as an \textit{individual} task. Albeit this, it is important to stress that Anti-Climacus, and Kierkegaard in general, does not view the self as existing in solipsistic isolation. As Rudd explains, the self “always exists in relation to what is other than it – including, crucially, other selves.”\textsuperscript{161} This aspect is evident in Anti-Climacus’ accounts of despairing over the earthly or over oneself. The former kind of despair, i.e., to despair over the earthly or something earthly, describes a state of being always directed towards the external. That is, instead of directing himself inward, the despairing person directs himself outwards to the world and others.\textsuperscript{162} In contrast, to despair over oneself, one ends up in \textit{reserve}, where one could view the despairing person as failing to relate himself to the world. That is, his “true” self is “hidden behind a door within himself”, and he will not disclose it to the world.\textsuperscript{163} Both these cases of despair represent a misrelation between the external and internal. This misrelation can accordingly be viewed as an imbalance between how we relate to ourselves and the world, i.e., others. Even though the task of becoming oneself involves becoming conscious of one’s own individuality, it is still evident that one cannot become oneself in a solipsistic fashion. Accordingly, we can summarize Rudd’s teleological view and its relation to \textit{SUD} as such: In coping with the inherent tension within ourselves, we are actively trying to become ourselves. This includes being self-conscious of the synthesis of self-acceptance and self-shaping, relating to this synthesis (inward), and relating to the external world (outward). However, all this is only possible if we have an underlying commitment to the Good, of which we are conscious of and relate to.

In light of this, it is evident that Rudd’s teleological view on the Kierkegaardian self can be applied within the context of \textit{E/O} and \textit{SUD}. However, it is now important to examine how Rudd views the temporal dimension of the Anti-Climacan self.

\section*{3.2.2. The temporality of Anti-Climacan selves - the eternal and narrative}

To understand the leap from Rudd’s teleological understanding of the Anti-Climacan self and his narrative view on its temporal dimension, we have to distinguish between the concepts \textit{self-constitution} and \textit{self-understanding}. The former was related to the teleological aspect of

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid. 47.
\textsuperscript{162} Kierkegaard, \textit{SUD}, 86-86/SKS 11, 171.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid. 94-97/SKS 11, 177-180.
Anti-Climacan selfhood. The threefold teleology at work in Rudd’s analysis of *E/O* and *SUD* is therefore essentially about how we achieve true/full selfhood, i.e., self-constitution. The teleological nature of the Anti-Climacan self shows how this self is constituted by the self coping with an inherent tension within itself (*telos* (i)), how it properly directs itself to the world (*telos* (ii)), and how this is only possible through an underlying commitment to the Good (*telos* (iii)). In contrast, the narrative view on the Anti-Climacan self gives this self a temporal dimension, in which the self understands itself. This narrative self-understanding is, in my view, primarily centred on the aspect of *narrative unity*, which is also related to the aspect of intelligibility. As will be shown, the relation between narrative unity and Anti-Climacan selfhood is best understood in relation to the concept of ‘eternity’.

The aspect of intelligibility primarily consists of viewing one’s own life as embedded within a narrative structure. That is, by placing one’s actions within a narrative, they become more intelligible, which in turn makes one’s life more intelligible. This kind of intelligibility is not a mere sequence of causal events, but it is an “account of the doings of intentional agents”.\(^{164}\) Moreover, this also implies that narratives are essentially *teleological*, because they provide reasons and not just causes.\(^{165}\)

The second aspect, unity (wholeness), is closely related to narrative intelligibility, and involves understanding one’s life as a whole. The role of intelligibility and narrative implies that by having a wider narrative, i.e., more context, the more intelligible any given action becomes, thus making oneself more intelligible. However, and this is the most important aspect, if I am to understand my life and the self I am in narrative terms, I must understand my life as a whole. This involves understanding my “past as establishing a coherent trajectory for my future, and to realize my capacity to evaluate and perhaps try to change that trajectory in the light of my ambitions and ideals.”\(^{166}\) Accordingly, one must have an understanding of one’s temporality as being constitutive of oneself. However, Rudd also points out that one must understand how one’s giveness/facticity also shapes this temporal self-understanding. This latter point is evidently clear, but the relation this narrative self-understanding has with *SUD* needs to be accounted for. As we shall see, this is best expressed when viewing the role of ‘eternity’ and its relation to the Anti-Climacan self.

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164 Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 177.
165 Ibid. 178.
166 Ibid. 186-187.
In discussing the polarity between the temporal and eternal, Rudd proposes *three* ways of understanding this polarity. According to Rudd, each of these interpretations contains strong similarities with a narrative view on identity. An important point to note on Rudd’s interpretations is that the temporal always signifies the temporal dimension we, as selves, occupy. In contrast, the eternal, or “eternity”, is interpreted by Rudd differently each time and represents (i) our capacity to evaluate our temporality, (ii) the Good as being eternal, and (iii) eschatological judgement as a “regulative ideal”.

His first suggested reading of eternity is a weak interpretation of the concept, and takes the concept to be a “poetic way” of noting how the self, although a temporal being, has the capacity to transcend its temporal dimension.\(^\text{167}\) What this amounts to is underlining our ability to “step back” and evaluate our past and possible future. As Rudd writes:

> We can reflect on where our lives are going, what trajectories they are describing. And not just as passive spectators; we have the capacity to try and shape those trajectories, to give direction in our lives. So we are not just temporal beings, but consciously self-shaping temporal beings, who are aware of the temporal structure of our lives.\(^\text{168}\)

However, Rudd also stresses that this does not entail that we have the capacity to gain an “absolute perspective”. We can never fully grasp the wholeness of our lives, since there are always certain events that are outside of my own experience, for example my own death. Still, the first reading of eternity consists in viewing it as our ability to transcend (partially) our temporal dimension. This also underlines how we are not just passive spectators of our own temporality, or narratives. In being able to step back and evaluate one’s past and future, one also has the capacity to try and shape one’s future narrative, i.e., the anticipated trajectory of my present self. As Rudd stresses, “we are not just temporal beings, but consciously self-shaping temporal beings, who are aware of the temporal structure of our lives.”\(^\text{169}\) This aspect of the relation we have with our own temporality, relates to narrative self-understanding, i.e., understanding one’s narrative as a whole. In “looking beyond” the present moment, one could try to understand one’s own life as a whole.

The second reading of eternity involves viewing the opposition between the temporal and eternal as being representative of “becoming oneself” and relating to the Good. On this view, the *telos* of becoming oneself, i.e., *telos* (*i*), cannot be viewed as an end-state that we achieve at one point in time. Rather, it must be understood as something that is continually worked upon. As Rudd writes, “in temporality, we never simply arrive at a stable balance of

\(^{167}\) Ibid. 164.

\(^{168}\) Ibid.

\(^{169}\) Ibid.
immanence and transcendence.”

We are constantly working to balance out the synthesis of immanence and transcendence. This is reflected (negatively) in *SUD*, when Anti-Climacus writes about the possibility of not being in despair: “For it to be true that someone is not in despair, he must be annihilating that possibility every instant.” Moreover, this is only possible if have an underlying commitment to the Good, which in turn is a set of eternal and absolute values. That is why, according to Rudd, Anti-Climacan selfhood is a continuation of becoming oneself. The Good, which is the most fundamental telos and accordingly the grounding for the possibility of realizing the other two teloi, is unchangeable (eternal).

This view on eternity that Rudd proposes thus suggests that Anti-Climacan selfhood is both the activity and product of self-constitution. In light of this view, it is evident that it shares some similarities with Rudd’s narrative view, where he argues that a self must both be the protagonist and author of its own narrative. That is, in understanding one’s own selfhood through a narrative, one must both conceive oneself as the subject of that given narrative and the one who is responsible for that narrative.

The third and strongest reading of eternity is related to the concept of eschatological judgment, which I mentioned in chapter 3.1.2. This interpretation is closest to Anti-Climacus’ explicit view on eternity. On this view, eternity becomes the vantage point from which our whole life is judged. This is, obviously, a very theological view on eternity, as it presupposes the reality of an afterlife. However, Rudd explains that independently of religious belief, one could still accept with this reading of eternity to some extent. This is possible if the “thought of looking back on our lives from eternity” becomes a sort of regulative ideal. That is, if we imagine that our lives are to be judged as a whole in eternity, i.e., the afterlife, then this would accordingly give us a criterion for how we are to live our temporal lives. The essential idea behind this reading seems to be that eternity, as a regulative ideal, gives us a perspective on our lives that includes how we have lived and how we are living it now, thus making us question whether we are living “truthfully” to our underlying teloi. Although this reading is the closest to the view on eternity in *SUD*, it is also a strong deviation from it, due the Anti-Climacus’ belief in immortality. Notwithstanding this point, Rudd’s reading still involves strong similarities to his overall view on selfhood. In viewing eternity as a regulative ideal, it

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170 Ibid. 165.
172 Rudd, *Self, Value, and Narrative*, 166.
173 This view on Anti-Climacan selfhood can pose some problems, or more precisely: problems of constitution. However, these problems will be discussed in more detail in part 4.
175 Ibid. 166.
underlines the importance of understanding one’s temporality as a whole (narrative) and living in accordance with one’s underlying teloi.

### 3.3. Conclusion to part 3

In light of the various aspects of Anti-Climacan selfhood, it is seemingly justified to claim that Rudd’s theory of selfhood and narrative is applicable to SUD. As have been shown, Anti-Climacan selves are teleological, which is strongly related to the concept of self-constitution. It is evident that SUD presents selfhood as a task, which can be viewed as a telos that one must actively work towards realizing. Rudd’s narrative view on SUD is, as I have argued, best understood as a method of self-understanding. Given all the various aspects of how the Anti-Climacan self is constituted, I think Rudd’s idea of a narrative self shows how one is supposed to comprehend all of these various aspects. That is, through viewing and understanding oneself and one’s life in narrative terms, one gains more intelligibility, coherence and continuity. In having this narrative understanding of one’s own self, one can accordingly be more conscious of one’s teleological nature.
4. Problems with and alternatives to narrative identity in Kierkegaard

The previous two parts of this thesis has been dedicated to accounting for the main content of Kierkegaard’s works *E/O* and *SUD*, and while doing so, attempting to extract the most essential philosophical content that is relevant to this thesis’ main theme. In addition, part 2 and 3 gave an account of Anthony Rudd’s theory of selfhood and narrative identity, and tried to show how his theory can be applied to *E/O* and *SUD*. Following these two exegetical sections, we are now ready to review and discuss Rudd’s narrative view on *E/O* and *SUD*. Accordingly, part 4 will be concerned with various problems that can be made against Rudd’s narrative claims about Kierkegaard. I will also suggest possible ways Rudd’s theory can answers these problems.

Part 4 will be divided into three main chapters, each concerned with Rudd’s narrative interpretation of Kierkegaard. To begin with, Chapter 4.1 will discuss John Lippitt’s criticism against Rudd’s reading of *E/O*, where Lippitt argues that Judge Vilhelm’s argument for the ethical contains far more “substantive normative content” that can be reduced to a plea for narrative unity. Lippitt will also argue that Rudd’s concepts of narrative unity and intelligibility cannot be used to distinguish aesthetes from ethicists. Following this, Chapter 4.2 will discuss Walter Wietzke’s view on narrativity in *E/O*. Wietzke argues that the claim Rudd made about narrative identity in *E/O* is too strong, which places him in a similar position as Lippitt. However, his view on narrativity in *E/O* will also help reinforce Rudd’s narrative claims made about aesthete *A*. Chapter 4.3, the final chapter, is primarily concerned with a different view on the temporality of selfhood in *E/O* and *SUD*. In this chapter, Patrick Stokes’ view on the temporality of Kierkegaardian selfhood will be discussed, where he questions why there must be such a strong conception of narrative applied to the interpretation of the temporality of selves in *E/O* and *SUD*. This is reflected in Rudd’s rejection of the distinction between minimal and narrative selves. As such, Stokes argues that we can identify an analogue to this distinction in Kierkegaard’s works. Stokes’ view about the distinction between minimal/narrative self in Kierkegaard will therefore suggest that Rudd’s narrative view is too strong when considering the phenomenal distinction between our present self and temporal extended self.

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176 Lippitt, *Getting the Story Straight*, 34.
In discussing and presenting these various critiques against Rudd’s narrative view on *E/O* and *SUD*, I hope to show that Rudd can answer most of these problems, thus justifying his interpretation to some extent. As it will be shown, it is evident that both works contain aspects of selfhood that can pertain to a narrative theory of selfhood. However, it will also be evident that Rudd’s theory is too strong in its applicability to *E/O* and *SUD*. This becomes apparent when regarding certain problems related to his narrative interpretation.

**4.1. Lippitt and the problem about narrative unity and intelligibility in *E/O***

We saw in part 2 that Rudd argued for a reading of *E/O* that presented the ethical life view as having the essential characteristics of a narrative identity. In contrast to the ethical, the aesthetic life view was viewed as being in a state of despair because of its lack of narrative unity. Rudd’s claim was grounded in Judge Vilhelm’s argument for the ethical, where the ethical is presented as having a strong sense of continuity and teleological order, which are important aspects within a Rudd’s narrative view. Although these claims are supported by the text to some extent, there are nevertheless some problems with Rudd’s view that need to be addressed. In his article, *Getting the Story Straight*, Lippitt formulates two main objections against Rudd’s narrative interpretation of *E/O*. These objections are centred on *how* we are to interpret Judge Vilhelm’s argument for the ethical, and *why* the aesthetic person should choose to ethical. As such, this chapter will be divided into three parts, where I present and discuss Lippitt’s objections, as well as formulating possible answers that pertain to Rudd’s theory.

**4.1.1. Vilhelm’s argument for the ethical revisited**

The lack of narrative unity in the aesthetic life view is, according to Rudd, grounded in the claim that their (aesthetic persons) narrative is incoherent and unintelligible. The ethical person, in contrast, has a coherent, unified and intelligible narrative. The main question pertaining to *E/O*, when invoking this understanding of the two life views, is: why should one choose the ethical over the aesthetic life? Rudd’s answer is that by virtue of choosing the ethical, the aesthetic person’s narrative will become more stable and unified. In reviewing Rudd’s claims about the aesthetic and ethical life view, Lippitt presents a series of problems related to Vilhelm’s appeal to the ethical and Rudd’s emphasis on narrative unity.

The first problem pertaining to Rudd’s view on *E/O* is how we are to view the content of Vilhelm’s argument for the ethical. As Lippitt states, “Judge Vilhelm’s argument contains
far more in the way of substantive normative claims than can be boiled down to talk of the
‘narrative structure’ or ‘narrative unity’ of a life.”\textsuperscript{177} Although Lippitt agrees with Rudd that a
need for commitment is a central part of Vilhelm’s argument, there is still much more to his
appeal for the ethical. Lippitt highlights essentially three aspects of Vilhelm’s argument for
the ethical that can be viewed as not pertaining to the claim about narrative unity. However, it
is also important to stress that Rudd’s narrative claims are not in direct conflict with the text,
i.e., \textit{E/O}.

The first aspect that Lippitt underlines is Vilhelm’s belief in God. In his discussion of
“the ethical choice”, Vilhelm explains that if the “choice is undertaken with all the
personality’s inwardsness”, the person who chooses is accordingly “brought into immediate
relation to the eternal power \textit{whose omnipresence} interpenetrates the whole of existence.”\textsuperscript{178}
This talk of “immediate relation to an eternal power” is almost identical with Anti-Climacus’
talk of selfhood in \textit{SUD}, where “choosing oneself” is not just about becoming aware of
oneself, but also about becoming aware of being before God. Or put more bluntly by Lippitt:
“Choose wrongly, and God will show you that you are wrong.”\textsuperscript{179}

This aspect is further elicited in Vilhelm’s discussion on \textit{guilt} and \textit{repentance}, which
is the second aspect that Lippitt highlights. An important aspect of choosing oneself is to
become self-aware and conscious of one’s own concretion, i.e., one’s facticity, thus involving
a strong sense of self-acceptance. This aspect was presented in part 2, where Rudd stressed the
importance of taking responsibility over one’s life, which included both one’s own past and
possible future. Moreover, this aspect of responsibility was seemingly lacking in A’s life and
aesthetic existence, thus supporting Rudd’s claim about aestheticism lacking narrative unity.
However, as Lippitt explains, Vilhelm’s talk of becoming self-aware includes an aspect of
guilt, which leads to a need for repentance.\textsuperscript{180} In choosing oneself, one discovers that there are
aspects of oneself that are appalling, but in this moment of choosing oneself, one cannot
disregard or reject these aspects. In describing this side of choosing oneself, Vilhelm explains
that “the expression of this fight, of this acquiring, is – repentance.”\textsuperscript{181} Furthermore, this act
of becoming self-aware of one’s guilt and repenting leads, ultimately, to one finding oneself
in God.\textsuperscript{182} This stresses the point of becoming self-conscious of being before God, which is
apparent in \textit{SUD}. Accordingly the aspect of repentance and being before God, can be viewed

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid. 39.
\textsuperscript{179} Lippitt, \textit{Getting the Story Straight}, 39.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{181} Kierkegaard, \textit{E/O}, 518/SKS 3, 207
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
as the theological understanding of “choosing oneself”, or self-acceptance, in *E/O*. The notion of self-acceptance and its relation to theology is further mentioned by Vilhelm, when he explains that “it is only if I choose myself as *guilty*, that I choose myself absolutely, if ever my choosing absolutely is not to be identical with *creating myself*.”\(^{183}\)

The third aspect of Vilhelm’s argument that does not contain any notion of narrative unity is his view that it is everyone’s duty to marry and work for a living. In the later parts of his letter to *A*, Vilhelm stresses that, from the ethical point of view, “it is every man’s duty to work in order to live.”\(^{184}\) This is contrasted with the aesthetic life view, which is more concerned with the idea of freedom and how work and duty are confining to oneself. Without going into too much detail about Vilhelm’s view on work, it is important to note his insistence upon following the ethical principle: “it is every man’s duty to marry.”\(^{185}\) This is thoroughly discussed in Vilhelm’s first letter to *A*, *The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage*, where he argues that marriage is, by virtue of the ethical, the aesthetic expression of love. However, the importance of these two aspects is to show how Vilhelm also views vocation and marital relationship as essential and normative aspects of the ethical life view.\(^{186}\)

In light of these three aspects, it is evident that Vilhelm’s argument for the ethical is not only an appeal to having narrative unity in one’s life. The latter is naturally encapsulated in his view on commitment and continuity, which is evident in Rudd’s analysis. However, Lippitt is clearly justified in arguing that Vilhelm’s argument contains far more substantive normative content, i.e., belief in God, guilt and repentance, and duty to work and marry, which cannot be reduced to “have narrative unity”.

### 4.1.2. Why choose the ethical?

Although it is evident that Vilhelm’s argument contains far more than just a plea to narrative unity, a pressing question that both Lippitt and Rudd addresses is: what is *A*’s, or the aesthetic individual’s, *incentive* to actually choose the ethical? That is, what is to be gained in abandoning the aesthetic life view and choosing the ethical? Rudd’s narrative theory makes it possible for him to provide an answer to this question, as he explains that human beings share “a desire for a coherent, meaningful life”, which is best expressed as having a narrative unified life.\(^{187}\) On this view, the aesthetic individual’s purported despair is caused by his

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\(^{183}\) Ibid. /SKS 3, 208. My italics.

\(^{184}\) Ibid. 564/SKS 3, 266.

\(^{185}\) Ibid. 572/SKS 3, 287.

\(^{186}\) This will be further discussed in the chapter on Wietzke.

\(^{187}\) Rudd, *Reason in Ethics*, 140.
inability to have the sought out coherent and meaningful life that is available through choosing the ethical. Accordingly, the benefit of becoming ethical is to have this coherent and meaningful unity in one’s own life. Moreover, this would also involve having an underlying commitment to the Good, which implies that one has, in some sense, a stable moral footing.

However, it is important to stress that, according to Rudd, this appeal to narrative unity is strictly an ethical notion. Vilhelm clearly has an understanding of the aesthetic life view as being “lesser” than the ethical life, and this could be grounded on the aesthetes’ rejection of or inability to have an underlying commitment to the Good. The “wholeness” of a unified narrative life is accordingly only brought about through one’s ethical commitment, i.e., one’s commitment to the Good. However, this poses a problem for Rudd. Lippitt questions how the aesthetic individual is supposed to feel inclined towards the ethical, if the reasons for choosing such a life are strictly ethical? That is, if A is placed outside any ethical framework and has no interests in the ethical as such, why should ethical reasons have any force in persuading him to choose that life? Moreover, if we view the argument for choosing the ethical as being neutral, i.e., not an ethical notion, Vilhelm’s appeal to narrative unity will still not suffice as an incentive. As was briefly touched upon in part 2, Lippitt points out how Vilhelm recognizes that general cases of aestheticism, e.g., lives devoted to wealth or health, all “have a certain unity, a certain coherence, that is, one definite thing on which everything depends.” Lippitt also explains that such lives can also be regarded as having some sense of continuity, due to their pursuit and devotion of a goal. Accordingly, the appeal to unity seems to lack any force in motivating the aesthetic individual to choose the ethical.

In light of this, it becomes evident that the ethical values that belong to the ethical life, which Vilhelm recommends, also can be viewed as losing force in persuading the aesthetic individual A. Lippitt explains that the conventional life that Vilhelm argues for would not satisfy A, which is evident from the latter’s criticism of boredom, marriage and friendship in Crop Rotations. Although Vilhelm’s argument for commitment and unity may be viewed as an important insight in his appeal to A, it does not follow that we can disregard aesthetic existence in general because of A’s particularities. This is important to notice, because it questions how we are to understand Rudd’s reading of E/O. Rudd’s reading of the ethical life as being one of unity and intelligibility, i.e., narrative unity, seems to be best applicable to A’s

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188 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 170.
189 Lippitt, Getting the Story Straight, 39-40.
190 Kierkegaard, E/O, 496/SKS 3, 178.
191 Lippitt, Getting the Story Straight, 40.
192 Ibid.
case. However, it does not seem to have the same force, if any, when applied to the more general cases of aestheticism.\textsuperscript{193} Even Johannes the Seducer has some degree of narrative unity in his life. Whereas with \textit{A}, it is evident that his rejection of commitment and lack of any \textit{telos} allows Rudd and Vilhelm’s argument for why he should choose the ethical over the aesthetic to gain traction.

\textbf{4.1.3. Possible answers to Lippitt’s critique}

In light of the criticism of narrative in \textit{E/O} put forth by Lippitt, it is apparent that the main question for narrative theory is \textit{why} \textit{A}, or aesthetes in general, should choose the ethical. Following this, I will therefore present possible answers that pertain to Rudd’s theory. However, it is also important to note that some of these answers are made explicitly by Rudd himself.

In responding to Lippitt’s criticism, Rudd explains that the paradox pertaining to \textit{A}’s motivation for choosing the ethical lies in “Kierkegaard’s distinction between sense, or degrees, of selfhood.”\textsuperscript{194} This distinction can often be understood as the division between \textit{aesthetic, ethical} and \textit{religious}, but it also consists of understanding selfhood as being contingent of self-consciousness. The relation between self-consciousness and selfhood is best expressed in \textit{SUD} where Anti-Climacus clearly states that “the more consciousness, the more will, the more will, the more self.”\textsuperscript{195} Following this, Rudd explains that to be a self requires one being “a self-conscious mental subject”, which also involves having “\textit{some} narrative sense of one’s past and capacity for planning future actions.”\textsuperscript{196} In relation to \textit{A} and other aesthetic individuals, Rudd acknowledges that they all have this weak narrative sense. They are all self-conscious of their lives as having some degree of narrative structure. As such, the aesthetic life view does not differ from the ethical. However, it is when selfhood becomes an “ethical ideal of autonomy and integration” that aesthetic individuals fall short. On this view, Rudd explains that one is required to have a \textit{strong} narrative sense of one’s own self.\textsuperscript{197} It is clear that \textit{A} does not have this strong narrative sense of his own selfhood, but, as Rudd admits, why should he care? As was explained above, if narrative unity is not a non-ethical ideal, why should the argument for the ethical have any force on \textit{A}? According to Rudd, the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{193} This is also further discussed in the chapter on Wietzke.
\item \textsuperscript{194} Rudd, \textit{Self, Value, and Narrative}, 170.
\item \textsuperscript{195} Kierkegaard, \textit{SUD}, 59/SKS 11, 145.
\item \textsuperscript{196} Rudd, \textit{Self, Value, and Narrative}, 170.
\item \textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
force of the argument lies in A unwillingness to embrace his telos, which is to fully become a self.

The unwillingness to embrace one’s own telos of becoming a self is grounded in Rudd’s teleological understanding of Kierkegaardian selfhood, and is perhaps better expressed in SUD than in E/O. The telos of becoming a self must be viewed as a potential and a task, and one’s failure or unwillingness to embrace and work towards this telos is to be in a state of despair. Given Rudd’s understanding of the teleology at work in both E/O and SUD, it is therefore important to stress that any individual, who does not have an underlying commitment to the Good, cannot fully become a self. That is why Rudd explains that the aesthete is a “divided self”, emphasizing Kierkegaard’s distinction between degrees of selfhood. The aesthetic individual is, to some extent, self-conscious of the teleological nature of its own selfhood, but this individual’s life view lead him to suppress or deny this awareness. As such, Rudd explains that the aesthete, or A in particular, does not accept the ethical arguments because he “does not want to accept them”. Accordingly, Rudd explains that A’s despair is a result from his defiance of any telos that could give meaning to his life. Vilhelm’s appeal to A to choose the ethical can therefore be understood as an argument for choosing a life view that is in accordance with one’s teleological nature. The force of his argument, which should appeal to A, is therefore centred on the acceptance of commitments and ethical responsibilities that will ultimately lead him to realizing his telos of becoming a self.

Although Lippitt’s criticism of narrative unity and Rudd’s understanding of E/O is clearly warranted by the text, Rudd’s theory can also be viewed as an important insight to how we can understand the nature of the Kierkegaardian self in E/O. However, Rudd’s emphasis on the teleological nature of selfhood seems to leave the notion of narrative unity out of the discussion. As Lippitt states in his article: “To judge a life as morally shabby or as failing to realise its telos is not (…) the same as judging it as incoherent or unintelligible.” Moreover, as was shown above, narrative unity cannot be viewed as the primary reason when arguing for the ethical. Although this is the case, I would propose a possible interpretation of the relation between narrative unity and the teleological nature of selfhood, which is intended to clarify that the notion of narrative unity is still an important aspect of Rudd’s main view on E/O.

198 Ibid. 171.
199 Ibid.
200 Lippitt, Getting the Story Straight, 43.
Even though A and other aesthetes may not be persuaded in choosing the ethical by appealing to narrative unity, the notion is still implicit in Rudd’s claim about living in accordance with one’s telos. As mentioned before, Rudd differentiates between a weak and strong narrative sense of one’s own selfhood. The former involves our self-conscious experience of our own temporality, while the latter is a requirement for selfhood viewed as an ethical ideal of autonomy and integration. Given that A and other aesthetic individuals are living in defiance of their teleological nature, they reject any ethical values or ideals that are in accordance with this aspect of their selfhood. That is, in not wanting to realize their telos of fully becoming a self, they are implicitly, or explicitly, rejecting any ethical commitments, responsibilities and values that is required to become a self (ethically). As Rudd stated, the force of Vilhelm’s argument depends on the acceptance of these ethical demands, because they will ultimately lead you to realize your telos. This, in turn, is only possible if you have a strong narrative sense of your own selfhood. Accordingly, the narrative unity that some of the aesthetic individuals have in their lives is too weak for them to live in accordance with their telos. Albeit this, it is still worth noting that Rudd does not give an explicit account of a strong narrative sense of selfhood. Moreover, this notion also seems to presuppose that to have a strong narrative sense of one’s own self is constitutive of full selfhood. However, as I argued in part 3, Rudd’s notion of narrative would be more fitting if related to self-understanding, rather than self-constitution. Viewed as such, to have narrative unity, or a strong narrative sense of one’s own self, would entail that one is conscious of being situated within a progressive narrative of which one is partially in control. That is, one is the co-author of one’s own narrative. As such, one is conscious of how one can shape one’s narrative, which must be done in accordance with one’s facticity. The tension, i.e., self-acceptance vs. self-shaping, that Rudd, and Anti-Climacus, emphasise can therefore be best understood and balanced out when one has a narrative understanding of one’s self. This would also consist of having an understanding of the teleological nature of one’s selfhood, as this teleology involves the balancing of the inherent tension in our self. Accordingly, the self-constitutive aspect of Kierkegaardian selfhood, which is related to Rudd’s teleological understanding, does not consist of having narrative unity. It is our self-understanding of having this teleological nature that is related to narrative unity.
4.2. Wietzke: *Either/Or* and narrativity

Following the criticism made by Lippitt in relation to the narrative claims made about why an aesthetic individual should choose the ethical, I shall now present and discuss Walter Wietzke’s discussion of Rudd’s narrative interpretation of *E/O*. In his essay, *Narrative and Normativity*, Wietzke discusses the differentiation between aesthetic life in general and the particularity of A’s life, and is therefore able to present us with a more refined understanding on the narrative claims made by Rudd.\(^{201}\) Notwithstanding Rudd’s claim that narrative unity is an ethical ideal, Wietzke argues that A’s motivational basis for choosing the ethical should still be grounded in an appeal to a more stable narrative, due to A’s apparent lack of continuity and commitment. The reason behind this claim is because Wietzke views A as already being engaged with the ethical at some level, thus making A susceptible to the reasons for choosing the ethical.\(^{202}\) As such, Wietzke is actually reinforcing Rudd’s claim about narrative in relation to A in *E/O*. Furthermore, Wietzke also shows why Rudd’s teleological understanding of the Kierkegaardian self supports the view that ethical life is more rational to choose than an aesthetic. However, Wietzke is more critical to Rudd’s narrative theory when considering its application on more general cases of aesthetic existence. As will be shown, Wietzke argues that the narrative claim made about A does not have the same force when applied to general, or “effective aesthetes”, because their lives possess the temporal continuity and unity that is necessary for a narrative. Moreover, an appeal to ethical values and an underlying telos is not sufficient in arguing against an aesthetic life view in general, because aesthetic values can also provide such individuals with the framework for establishing a meaningful and stable identity.

Accordingly, this chapter will begin by presenting Wietzke’s view on the narrative claims on A’s reasons for choosing the ethical life. As was explained, this is both a positive view and reinforcement of Rudd’s interpretation of A. Following this, Wietzke’s critical view of the application of same the narrative claims on general cases of aesthetic existence will be presented. Accordingly, it will be evident that Rudd’s narrative argument exaggerates how an aesthetic individual can be motivated by both narrative and ethical values, i.e., an ethical telos.

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\(^{202}\) Wietzke, *Narrative and Normativity*, 100.
4.2.1. Aesthete A and why narrative works

As have been accounted for and discussed throughout this thesis, one of the main characteristics of the aesthete A is his lack or rejection of continuity and commitments. Given that Rudd views the argument for the ethical as an argument for narrative unity, it is natural to assume that A has valid reasons for choosing the ethical and accordingly escape his despairing aesthetic life. However, as the previous chapter showed, narrative unity is, according to Rudd, best understood as an ethical ideal. As such, it would be contradictory to claim that A can accept the ethical reasons for choosing the ethical, if he is already invested in an aesthetic life and accordingly has no interest or understanding of ethical values. Even though this is an apparent problem for Rudd’s interpretation, Wietzke explains that A is, to some extent, already invested and engaged with ethical values. This is evident in Vilhelm’s letter to A, when he writes:

You admit the ethical has its importance, you say it is respectable for a man to live for his duties, that it is commendable, indeed you even let fall some innuendos about its being right and proper that there are people who live for their duties (...) you sometimes run across men of duty good-natured enough to find sense in this talk (...)\(^{203}\)

Accordingly, at some level, A has a conception and understanding of the ethical and its values in life. A is a divided self, i.e., he stands between the aesthetic and ethical, which is evident from him being conscious of his own despair, and by the fact that “the normative demand of ethical reasons has already made their claim on him.”\(^{204}\) If we accept this interpretation, then the paradoxical problem of narrative unity being an ethical ideal can be suspended. The “ethical narrative” that is argued for by Vilhelm is accordingly grounded in reasons that A can accept. However, as Wietzke points out, in showing why the ethical is more rational than the aesthetic, Rudd also involves a teleological understanding of selfhood. By having an unconditional telos, an individual can ground his or her ethical narrative in the pursuit of realizing this telos.\(^{205}\)

On the relation between narrative and an underlying human telos, Wietzke argues that several problems pertaining to Rudd’s view on narrative and A can be solved. One of these problems is made apparent by Lippitt’s criticism of the role narrative intelligibility has in E/O. As Lippitt argues, narrative intelligibility cannot distinguish the ethical from the aesthetic.

\(^{203}\) Kierkegaard, E/O, 558-559/SKS 3, 257-258.
\(^{204}\) Wietzke, Narrativity and Normativity, 100.
\(^{205}\) Ibid. 98. It worth noting that Wietzke does not take into account Rudd’s threefold structured teleology. Given that Rudd views an unconditional commitment to ‘the Good’ as our most fundamental telos, I would propose that we understand Wietzke’s talk of telos as this. The other two teloi ‘becoming ourselves’ and ‘relating to projects and relationships’ are nevertheless important to Rudd’s view, but the ethical/normative essence of our most fundamental telos captures Wietzke’s point about it giving us rational reasons for choosing the ethical.
Even if one’s life is that of despair, people can formulate intelligible narratives about their own lives. He continues by stating that, “whatever shortcomings of such lives (aesthetic), the issue is not that they are unintelligible.”\textsuperscript{206} However, as Wietzke argues, with an underlying \textit{telos} that provides the ethical person with a substantive ground for reasoning, Vilhelm’s ethical narrative contains far more objective situations about human activity, as opposed to an aesthetic narrative that lacks such a \textit{telos}.\textsuperscript{207} That is, an aesthetic narrative is more liable to self-deception due to its lack of an underlying \textit{telos}. By virtue of a universal and objective \textit{telos}, any narrative, which is in accordance with such a telos, should contain far more intelligibility than an aesthetic “fictional” narrative. Accordingly, if we view Vilhelm as arguing for narrative unity, and intelligibility, his position would be rather weak if no \textit{telos} was involved.

Another problem in relation to narrative identity is self-deception, that is; one can easily construct narratives that one may think is true, but is actually false.\textsuperscript{208} Rudd is aware of this problem as he explains that one’s implicit narrative sense and explicit narratives are often liable to cases of self-deception. He continues by stating, “we are constantly tempted to tell stories about our lives that make them seem nobler, more impressive, more successful than they really are.”\textsuperscript{209} However, as Wietzke argues, the involvement of a \textit{telos} solves the problem of self-deception because it “objectively represents concerns and interests that all human agents have.”\textsuperscript{210} That is, if our narrative is in accordance with the realization of our \textit{telos}, we should not be able to deceive ourselves about anything fundamental about our own narratives. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there are many cases where one would think he is acting properly in accordance with his \textit{telos}, while actually being deceived by this. Examples of this could be the Spanish Inquisition or Vladimir Lenin. In both cases, they believed that they were acting in accordance with a set of objective standards or \textit{telos}, while killing hundreds/thousands of people. As such, they could both be viewed as cases of self-deception, where they believe they are acting in accordance with the Good, even though this is clearly not the case. Although these cases are extreme, they still represent a clear weakness in Rudd and Wietzke’s argument that should be answered.

Notwithstanding this apparent problem, Wietzke argues that narratives with such an underlying \textit{telos}, e.g., the Good, provides stability, continuity and reasons for commitment to

\textsuperscript{206} Lippitt, \textit{Getting the Story Straight}, 38-39.
\textsuperscript{207} Wietzke, \textit{Narrativity and Normativity}, 99.
\textsuperscript{208} Lippitt, \textit{Getting the Story Straight}, 48-50.
\textsuperscript{209} Rudd, \textit{Self, Value, and Narrative}, 181.
\textsuperscript{210} Wietzke, \textit{Narrativity and Normativity}, 99.
an ethical narrative that is evidently lacking in A’s aesthetic life. As such, fundamentally, Rudd’s teleological understanding of the Kierkegaardian self can be understood as the motivational foundation for why an aesthete should choose the ethical life. However, this is only apparent when applied to the particular case of A, where he can easily accept the reasons to choose an ethical narrative over his aesthetic, since he lacks narrative stability and a commitment to a telos that is available in ethical existence. In contrast to this, Wietzke argues that the more general aesthetic life styles would not be as easily convinced by the ethical reasons given by Vilhelm. This is grounded in Wietzke’s view that there exists aesthetic persons who are not as conflicted as A, and that E/O legitimises such aesthetic persons, which ultimately weakens the argument for using narrative as a reason to choose the ethical over the aesthetic.

4.2.2. Effective aestheticism
In light of Vilhelm’s overall view on the aesthetic as opposed to the ethical life view, it is natural to understand him as viewing the aesthetic, i.e., all kinds of aestheticism, as ultimately failing to satisfy the normative demands made by the ethical. Even though this may be true, Wietzke argues that there are aesthetic persons who do not share the same problems that A suffers from, and can therefore still be viewed as effective agents: such agents can function well enough so that even if a person leads a marginally less meaningful life than what the ethical represents, this does not involve the agent in any serious practical contradiction that compromises her ability to interact practically with her world, pursue ends based on what she values, and so on.211 According to Wietzke, these effective aesthetes can be viewed as having two essential characteristics that makes them ultimately effective agents. The first aspect is centred on how an aesthetic person is motivated to act, as Wietzke refers to a passage from E/O where Vilhelm writes: “the personality already has interest in the choice before one chooses, and if one postpones the choice the personality makes the choice unconsciously (…)”212 According to Wietzke, this passage shows how an aesthetic person, absent from ethical reasons, still has some kind of grounding that maintains his or her motivations to act. Viewed pragmatically, Wietzke argues that human beings, aesthetic or ethical, approach practical choices with some set of “pre-established practical interests”.213 Accordingly, it would be wrong to view an

211 Ibid. 101.
213 Wietzke, Narrativity and Normativity, 103.
aesthetic person as not having any kind of motivational grounding that can help that person shape his or her life.

This leads to the second aspect, which is concerned with how human beings have a natural need to shape and organise their own lives, and form an idea of that life’s meaning and aim. As Vilhelm writes, “Every man, however modest his talents, however subordinate his position, feels a natural need to form a view of life, a conception of life’s meaning and aim.” Accordingly, aesthetic individuals seem to have the capacity to maintain a coherent and meaningful life, which is in accordance with certain aesthetic values that they adopt.

Moreover, as mentioned before in this thesis, Vilhelm also asserts that the lives of aesthetic persons can have a certain “unity and coherence”, which further shows how their lives contain the temporal continuity that is necessary for a narrative. Following these observations about aesthetic agency, Witezke concludes that the “difference in content between the aesthetic and ethical is inconsequential to the capacity to be a human agent.”

Although his argument is justified in light of Vilhelm’s view in E/O, Wietzke explains there is still a problem pertaining to the stability of the aesthetic values that a narrative can be grounded in. Wietzke uses the example of an Olympic athlete, who dedicates her life to the pursuit of achieving the highest merit within her chosen field. As such, this person leads a unified and coherent life narrative that is in accordance with her long-term goal that is representative of her aesthetic values in life. However, the problem occurs when an injury or some other incident endangers the realization and pursuit of this goal. It is quite possible that such an injury would force the athlete to reconsider her identity as an athlete, and result in her changing her narrative and goal. The problem is accordingly “the inherent instability and unsustainability of aesthetic values.” That is, the athlete’s aesthetic values are susceptible to external threats that make the related narrative unstable and difficult to maintain. Vilhelm explains that the problem with aesthetic values lies in their being posited “either outside the individual or in the individual but not posited by the individual himself.” In contrast to aesthetic values, ethical values and their related practices are meaningful in themselves. In following with Rudd’s view, the main reason why the Good is our most fundamental telos is because it is an unconditional and objective ethical value/goal that grounds all other activities and teloi that we pursue. That is why Rudd stresses the importance of having an underlying

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215 Ibid. 496/ SKS 3, 178.
216 Wietzke, Narrativity and Normativity, 103.
217 Ibid. 104.
218 Kierkegaard, E/O, 493/SKS 3, 175.
commitment to the Good. Following this, it should be evident that ethical values and its related telos provide a much more stable framework for constructing and maintaining a narrative than aesthetic values.

Even though Wietzke acknowledges that aesthetic values and narratives can suffer from instability and unsustainability, he still argues that ethical values also can suffer from external threats. Wietzke points out that “no form of life or worldview is immune to structural crises of the sort described above.”219 Accordingly, this also applies to the practices of ethical commitment. The most obvious of these would be marriage. Marriage is not a static entity, nor is our commitment to it unconditional, although many of us would probably like to think so. Although it is apparent that an ethical person, such as Vilhelm, from 19th century Copenhagen would view marriage as different from a person in 2017, I would still agree with Wietzke’s overall argument that certain ethical values and practices are not wholly immune to external threats. As such, one can question why the “supposed” stability of ethical values should have primacy over aesthetic ones. If the foundation for the ethical is susceptible to external threats that can make them worth reconsidering, why should the ethical reasons for abandoning our aesthetic values have any force? Accordingly, Wietzke is in much agreement with Lippitt’s claim that the distinction between the ethical and aesthetic lies in they being “substantively different normative frameworks”.220

To conclude, it becomes clear that Wietzke agrees with much of Rudd’s claims about narrativity and teleology in E/O, but is critical to the idea that these claims can justify why ‘effective aesthetes’ should choose the ethical over the aesthetic. Although A can be viewed as having good reasons for choosing the ethical, which can be grounded in him lacking a strong narrative that is grounded in an objective human telos, his case stands as too particular in giving the argument any force against general cases of aestheticism. Lippitt also pointed this out, when he explained, “one cannot dismiss the aesthetic life in general on the basis of the particularities of A.”221 As such, Wietzke showed how an aesthetic person can lead a well-organised and meaningful life, which has a narrative structure and an underlying aesthetic telos. Although the aesthetic values are vulnerable to external threats, such problems can also afflict the ethical life, thus questioning the superiority of the ethical over the aesthetic. However, one could also suspect that the ethical life is more resistant to such problems, given

219 Wietzke, Narrativity and Normativity, 105.
220 J. Lippitt, Getting the Story Straight, 34.
221 Ibid. 37.
that it is more founded upon internal values, e.g., the Good, rather than changing external values.

In light of the preceding chapters, it has been clear that Rudd’s narrative view on E/O on can run up against some problems, given the strong conception of narrative identity in Rudd’s interpretation. However, it was also shown that Rudd could answer most of these problems when his teleological understanding of selfhood is applied as the grounding for his narrative view. As such, it is evident that Rudd’s narrative conception of Kierkegaardian selfhood must be understood within the context of a self that is always in pursuit of realizing some kind of telos. More importantly, it seems that most of the aforementioned critics are all satisfied with viewing the temporal dimension of Kierkegaardian selves as a narrative. The difference between the critics and Rudd is, on the other hand, centred on the significance of these narratives. That is, can a narrative view on Kierkegaardian selves explain certain questions that are essential to E/O, e.g., the difference between aesthetic and ethical existence. As such, a critical discussion about the temporality of Kierkegaardian selves has not really been brought to the fore. Accordingly, this last chapter will discuss this theme, and will focus on Patrick Stokes’ interpretation of the temporality of Kierkegaardian selves.

4.3. Stokes and the naked self

In his book *The Naked Self*, Stokes discusses the temporality of Kierkegaardian selves and argues that the narrative approach runs up against some problems concerning the distinction between the narrative self and a minimal self. The former represents our self-conception that is diachronically extended, while the latter is the present locus of our consciousness that relates to our diachronic extended narrative self. In wanting to find an analogy to this distinction, Stokes argues that there exists a notion of a “naked self” in both E/O and SUD, which illustrates how there is a phenomenological distinction between our self-experience as present-tensed subjects and self-understanding as temporally extended wholes.

4.3.1. Narrative and problems of constitution

A standard objection that is raised against narrative identity theories is that they confuse narratives with what the narratives are of. This is what Stokes calls the “constitution

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problem”, and it is centred on the claim that narratives are identical with the self that relates to that narrative.223 However, this problem does not arise for Rudd as he explicitly states that narrative and selfhood have a “mutual presupposition relationship”.224 As such, selfhood cannot be defined in terms of any prior notion of narrative, rather both must be understood in light of the other. Accordingly, Rudd wants to avoid the misunderstanding of viewing the self as a narrative. In contrast, the self must be viewed as the protagonist of its narrative.225 Moreover, having a narrative conception of one’s selfhood also consist of having a narrative self-understanding of one’s life as a whole. This leads Rudd to claim that we must view ourselves as the author/co-author of our own narratives. Even though this might avoid the basic premise of the constitution problem, Stokes explains that another problem is raised in light of this view. This problem is what Christine Korsgaard calls the “Paradox of Self-Constitution”, which questions how one can be both constitutor and constituted.226 In relation to Rudd’s narrative position, we can frame the question as the following: how can we be both the co-author and protagonist of our own narrative?

According to Stokes, Anti-Climacus’ view on selfhood can actually answer this paradox. Given Anti-Climacus’ formula for selfhood, we can view the self-constitutional process as the following: a human being is a synthesis of both physical and psychological features, which constitutes a self if and only if one relates to the synthesis in a proper way. As have been mentioned before in this paper, Anti-Climacus selfhood is both a potential and a task, which can lead to the conclusion that selfhood is an achievement. In viewing selfhood as a potential task that can be achieved, the paradox of self-constitution is cancelled. This because we separate the human being from the self, thus viewing the human being as the constitutor and the self as the constituted. That is, a human being is the constitutor of its own self by virtue of taking up responsibility of the task of selfhood and strives to achieve it, which can lead to the constitution of its self. As such, it becomes apparent that self-constitution is the essence of the human being, given that Anti-Climacus views selfhood as a task that we must strive to achieve.

Rudd views this process of self-constitution as being the result of properly negotiating the inherent tension between “self-shaping” and “self-acceptance”. That is, a self is “neither something simply given, nor something that creates itself, but something that exists in and

223 Ibid. 177.
224 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 185.
225 Ibid.
through the shaping of itself and in constantly negotiating the limits of what it can and cannot alter.”227 This mode of self-relation is worked up against a narrative understanding of ourselves, which involves taking responsibility of our own selfhood as being a unified whole across time. In having a narrative self-understanding of my self, I take ownership of my life as containing certain factual aspects, e.g., nationality and psychological characteristics, while also striving towards becoming the ideal self I want to be, which must be done within the limits of my own facticity. In offering a narrative view on the task of selfhood, one can argue that its “realization” is this “narrative mode of self-relation”, as described above.228 By taking up responsibility for this task, one is also responsible for how one relates to oneself, and accordingly how one shapes one’s own life in relation to one’s facticity, which could therefore be viewed as being the co-author of one’s own narrative. Subsequently, the aspect of being the protagonist of one’s own narrative consists in understanding oneself as being the main subject and product of this mode of self-relation. Hence the paradox is dissolved due to the bivalent character of narrative selfhood, which is expressed in being both responsible for realizing the task of selfhood through narrative mode of self-relation and being the product of this mode of self-relation.

Continuing with Rudd’s view on problems of constitution, it is important to note that his understanding of Kierkegaardian selfhood is centred on the idea that selfhood comes in degrees. That is, the self is not some isolated entity, which comes about through a human being’s self-relation. Rather, selfhood “designates a human being that has attained a certain self-reflexive state.”229 In giving this scalar picture of selfhood, Rudd claims that we are all, to some degree, already a self. The achievement of becoming a fully oneself is, on the other hand, dependent upon how we relate to ourselves. Given this view, Rudd understands Kierkegaardian selfhood as being both “something that already exists, and also a task.”230 Accordingly, Rudd argues that there are two senses of selfhood operating in Kierkegaard: a strong sense in which “selfhood is an ideal to be realized”, and a minimal sense where “to be a self (or person) is to be a self-conscious rational being for whom the realization of that ideal (...) is obligatory.”231 The realization of the task (ideal) being obligatory is grounded in the

227 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 43.
228 Although I have not used the term ‘narrative mode of self-relation’ before in this thesis, I believe it captures Rudd’s narrative view on the Anti-Climacan self, where Rudd’s narrative theory of selfhood is related to the self-relational aspect of Anti-Climacan selves.
229 Stokes, The Naked Self, 179.
230 Rudd, Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Narrative Unity, 541-549
231 Ibid.
view that selfhood is strictly an ethical or ethico-religious task, which is represented through either Vilhelm’s argument for the ethical or Anti-Climacus’ theological view on selfhood. Though more importantly, in giving this scalar picture of selfhood, Rudd can assert that there is always some degree of self in a person, which must accordingly take up the task of becoming a full self. I suggest that this twofold sense of self in Rudd solves some of the problem of self/constitution. Given that Rudd rejects the idea of viewing the human being as the constitutor of selfhood in SUD, Rudd must accordingly accept that there exists some minimal self at work in the Anti-Climacan self. According to Stokes, the acknowledgment of some minimal self is necessary for any narrative theory about selfhood, if they are to avoid such constitutional problems as described above. As I hope to have made clear, I think Rudd can satisfy this condition, by offering a scalar picture of Kierkegaardian selfhood, where an already existing minimal self is necessary for the self-relational process of becoming a self.

4.3.2. Minimal vs. narrative selves

The problem pertaining to Rudd’s understanding of a minimal self is his rejection of it being our most fundamental level of first-person experience. Even though Rudd has to concede that there is some minimal self at work in Kierkegaard’s view on selfhood, he still views the narrative self as the most basic level of selfhood, as he writes: “The narrative self is as basic as it gets (...) There is no more basic level of selfhood at which experiences are had before being interpreted in narrative terms.” Rudd rejects the minimal self as a conditional requirement for the construction of a narrative self-conception. In contrast to this rejection is the distinction between a “minimal” and the “narrative” self. According to Stokes, the distinction between the minimal self and narrative self points to an apparent distinction between the self experienced as a here-and-now subject, and the human being as a temporally extended whole. The narrative self is our self-conception that is diachronically extended, whereas the minimal self is the ‘present locus of consciousness’ that relates to the narrative self.

To understand the difference and relationship between these two notions of self, Stokes refers to Antonio Damasio’s view on consciousness and its relation to selfhood. As he explains, Damasio distinguishes between what he calls “core consciousness” and “extended consciousness”. The former “provides the organism with a sense of self about one moment –

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232 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 196.
233 Ibid. 182.
234 Ibid. 180.
now – and about one place – here”, while the latter “provides the organism with an elaborate sense of self (...) and places that person at a point in individual historical time, richly aware of the lived past and of the anticipated future (...)”.

Accordingly, Stokes explains that the minimal/core self and narrative self can be viewed as the following in relation to Damasio’s concepts of core and extended consciousness:

Core consciousness arises in response to each distinct ‘pulse’ of consciousness and is therefore confined to the present moment; accordingly, the core self, the entity that core consciousness senses itself to be, is only ‘a transient entity, ceaselessly re-created for each and every object with which the brain interacts’. Extended consciousness, by contrast, brings the past and future into view in the present moment and so gives rise to a temporally extended autobiographical self.

What Damasio’s view gives us is a picture of there being a minimal self that is at the most basic level of consciousness, where our self-experience is only limited to the present moment. In contrast, when consciousness is extended, we gain an experience of our own self as having a temporal extension that surpasses the here-and-now. An interesting aspect of the relationship between these two forms of selves is their asymmetrical relationship. As Stokes explains, in cases of severe anterograde amnesia, i.e., the loss of being able to create new memories, extended consciousness is severely destroyed, whereas core consciousness can remain intact. In contrast, the destruction of core self would entail the destruction of a narrative self.

According to Dan Zahavi, the distinction between the minimal and narrative self, answers the problems about constitution, as discussed earlier, where “there must be already some sort of self, something with a distinctive first-person perspective, to be able to articulate an identity in narrative terms.” Moreover, Stokes explains that the minimal self presented by Zahavi et al. is “phenomenologically more robust than a mere linguistic capacity for self-reference.” That is, our ability to use the first-personal pronoun depends on one experiencing oneself as a self, which involves a feeling of “mineness”. Accordingly, the minimal self, as understood by Stokes, is a phenomenological first-personal experience at the most basic level of consciousness. As such, it is radically different from Rudd’s


237 Ibid. 181.


240 Ibid.
understanding of a minimal self, as he views our narrative self as the most basic form of selfhood.

4.3.3. The Naked Self

In searching for an analogue to the distinction between minimal/narrative selves in Kierkegaard’s writings, Stokes argues that there exists a notion of a *naked self* within the works of Kierkegaard that is similar to the minimal self of Zahavi et al. For Kierkegaard, the self is not some pre-existing entity or persisting substance, but rather “something that exists in and through a human being’s relationship to itself, the world and (ultimately) towards the grounds of its being.” In viewing one of Kierkegaard’s early essays, *To Gain One’s Soul in Patience*, Stokes explains that the text accounts for the human being as possessing selfhood from the outset as its *telos*, which it is enjoined to become. A passage from the essay, referred to by Stokes, shows how Kierkegaard uses the phrase “nakedness of the soul”:

> One who comes naked into the world possesses nothing, but the one who comes into the world in the *nakedness of his soul* does nevertheless possess his soul, that is, as something that is to be gained, does not have it outside himself as something new that is to be possessed.

According to Stokes, the “nakedness of the soul” refers to our capacity to detach ourselves from the world and its facticity, which is a pre-condition of becoming oneself. That is, it signifies our ability to transcend our own immediacy and subsequently acquire selfhood, which is prevalent in both *E/O* and *SUD*. As Stokes will show, both *E/O* and *SUD* also use this “language of nudity” as expressed in *EUD*.

In *E/O*, Vilhelm writes the following about choice: “So while in the first instant of choice the person proceeds apparently *as naked as the child from its mother’s womb*, the next instant it is concrete in itself (...)” As have been explained before, in choosing oneself, one must accordingly choose oneself in one’s concretion. However, as Stokes points out, the abovementioned passage seems to indicate that there is some state of transition in choosing oneself. According to Stokes, the “nakedness” in the passage signifies “some state of transition where the subject has shaken off everything it immediately took itself to be (...) but not yet willed itself back into its concretion.” However, as has been pointed out before,

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241 Ibid.182.
one cannot remain in this state of transition, or as Vilhelm calls it: “complete isolation”.245 One must ‘repent’ oneself back into one’s concretion, i.e., choose oneself as this concretion. Accordingly, Stokes explains that Vilhelm’s notion of a naked self is only partially similar to the minimal self of Zahavi et al. This is because Vilhelm’s notion is only a transitory state that one must go through. As Stokes points out, Vilhelm’s naked self can be viewed as an “extensionless moment between aesthetic immediacy and ethical choice.”246

In light of this, Vilhelm’s naked self is more compatible with Rudd’s understanding of such a self, which is as only an abstract way of viewing our self as detached from its concretion or narrative.247 Furthermore, if we view Vilhelm’s naked self as a minimal self, then it would also fit Rudd’s understanding of the concept, because it is only a transitory state that is necessary, but not sufficient for becoming a self. As such, Stokes seems to be unjustified in claiming that Rudd needs to recognize that E/O, or more specifically, Vilhelm operates with the distinction between minimal/narrative selves.

In contrast to Vilhelm’s picture of the self, Stokes argues that Anti-Climacus’ understanding of selfhood as “resolutely present-tensed” and how this is expressed in relation to eternity supports his interpretation of a naked self as being similar to a minimal self. Like Vilhelm, Anti-Climaus also discusses the ability to both separate oneself from one’s concretion and, accordingly, take responsibility of them. This is best expressed in his discussion of ‘despair over the earthly’, where he describes the desparer as lacking this ability:

He has no consciousness of a self that is won by infinite abstraction from all externality. This self, naked and abstract, in contrast to the fully clothed self of immediacy, is the first form of the infinite self and the progressive impulse in the entire process through which a self infinitely takes possession of its actual self along with its difficulties and advantages.248

However, as was the case with Vilhelm, the passage above can easily be interpreted as describing our ability to “abstract” ourselves from our externalities and concretion. In wanting to avoid this interpretation, Stokes argues that Anti-Climacus’ understanding of eternity as the possibility for eschatological judgment shows how the naked self is our most fundamental sense of selfhood. In wanting to avoid the intricate position of defending Anti-Climacus’ belief in immortality, Stokes takes up Rudd’s understanding of eternity and the possibility of eschatological judgment as a “regulative ideal rather than a metaphysical reality.”249 In doing

246 Stokes, The Naked Self, 214.
247 Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 195 and 225.
249 Stokes, The Naked Self, 201. Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 166.
so, the eschatological judgment of a whole life becomes consistent with Rudd’s view of a narrative self being understood as a narrative whole, which I explained in part 3. It also points to the idea of living one’s life “as if we are heading towards an ending that will make sense of our lives in a certain way.”\footnote{Stokes, The Naked Self, 215.} Even though Stokes acknowledges that “eternity is a situation in which one’s life as a totality receives a final judgment”, he also explains that this judgment is “based upon its (the person being judged) status as it is now.”\footnote{Ibid. 200-201.} That is, we cannot speak of having been a self, but whether one is a self. As such, the self that is subject to this kind of judgment is a present-tensed self that is both separate from and closely related to its temporal extension. Here, it is important to remember the model of self-relation that Anti-Climacus presents in SUD. The model showed how one must relate both to one’s temporal dimension and the eternal. In keeping with Stokes’ interpretation, it is therefore important to note how he views one’s self-relation to the temporal as the relation one has with the temporally extended human being that one is. In contrast, the relation one has with the eternal is always in relation to the eschatological judgment, thus being a relation towards oneself here-and-now.

The upshot of this argument is the identification of the object of this eternal judgment. That is, if we are to always stand in relation to the eternal, even though we are not yet dead, there must be some sense of selfhood that can stand in relation to this form of judgment. This seems therefore to fit nicely with Stokes’ idea of a naked self. As he explains, the naked self is not a distinct metaphysical entity, but is a “feature of all self-experience”. Accordingly, this naked self that Stokes ascribes to Anti-Climacus involves imagining being subject to eschatological judgment where the naked self stands as “responsible for the concrete narratively schematized person that it both is and transcends.”\footnote{Ibid. 214.}

### 4.4. Conclusion to part 4

The discussion about minimal and narrative selves is primarily concerned with the phenomenological distinction between our self-experience as present-tensed subjects and temporally extended wholes. Stokes’ notion of a naked self showed how Kierkegaard can be viewed as operating with a similar distinction, which is represented as an aspect of our selfhood as being both wholly present, i.e., separate from our temporal extension, as well as being responsible for our life as a whole. This naked self was, as was shown above, best expressed when placed in relation to the Anti-Climacan self, where the concept of eternity, as
the possibility of eschatological judgment, was central. However, the naked self in E/O was not as suitable to the distinction between minimal and narrative selves, as it was in SUD. The idea of a naked self, as presented in E/O, seems to be more compatible with Rudd’s claim about the naked self as being a “poetic” way of referring to our capacity to transcend our own concretion. It is also important to note that Stokes’ argument for a naked self in SUD, presupposes that we differentiate between a temporally extended human being and a present tensed self. Given his narrative view on selfhood, it is apparent that Rudd would reject Stokes claims. As such, it could be argued that either Stokes’ claims fall short when directed at Rudd’s theory, or that Rudd has a too strong conception of narrative selfhood. Another important question is whether Rudd would at all accept the distinction between a minimal and narrative self. Even though Stokes claims that here are phenomenological grounds for asserting the existence of this distinction, I would argue that there are also persuasive arguments against this distinction, which would claim that our most basic form of self-experience is always done in narrative terms.253

253 Ibid. 180, and Rudd, Self, Value, and Narrative, 196.
5. Conclusion

This thesis’ main aim was to explore and analyse Anthony Rudd’s narrative theory of selfhood and its relation to Søren Kierkegaard’s works *Either/Or* and *The Sickness unto Death*, where Rudd’s interpretation of the Kierkegaardian self argued that this self is teleological and have strong aspects pertaining to narrative identity.

As was shown, Rudd’s interpretation of *E/O* argued that the distinction between the aesthetic and ethical life view can be viewed as a matter of either having or lacking narrative unity in one’s life, as well as either living in accordance with one’s teleological nature or not. Rudd’s teleological understanding of Kierkegaardian selfhood was in good accordance with how selfhood was presented in *E/O*. Rudd’s understanding of our most fundamental telos as the Good was also particularly well suited to the ethical context of *E/O*. His narrative interpretation of *E/O* was, in my view, mostly justified, given Judge Vilhelm’s description of the ethical life view as one of continuity, commitment and unity, which are all essential aspects of narrative identity. However, as was shown in part 4 of this thesis, Rudd’s narrative understanding of the distinction between aesthetic and ethical individuals cannot be applied to all aesthetic individuals, as it was evident there are many aesthetic individuals, apart from *A*, who can live unified lives that are grounded in the pursuit of a meaningful aesthetic telos. Although Rudd is justified in claiming that the concept of selfhood in *E/O* contains strong aspects of narrative identity, it is evident that his narrative theory is too strong and ambitious in wanting to account for the whole picture of selfhood as presented in *E/O*.

Rudd’s interpretation of the Anti-Climacan self contained most of the same arguments that were used in his interpretation of *E/O*. Rudd’s teleological understanding of Kierkegaardian selfhood was more evident when applied to the context of *SUD*, due to Anti-Climacus’ insistence on viewing selfhood as a task, instead of a given. Moreover, Rudd’s idea of an inherent tension between self-acceptance and self-shaping was also well suited to Anti-Climacus description of an inherent synthesis composed of various polarities. The narrative interpretation of the Anti-Climacan self was, as shown, best understood when viewing the concept of eternity as a regulative ideal. In viewing it as such, Rudd could argue that selves are always relating to themselves as a whole, thus taking responsibility of and evaluating their past, present and future self. However, as Stokes argued, we can also identify a naked self in *SUD*, which represents our present tense self-experience, when relating to the eternal. As such, this naked self is similar to the minimal self of Zahavi and Damasio. Even though, Stokes is right in eliciting the present-tense character of Anti-Climacan selves, his argument is still
somewhat overcomplicated in wanting to draw an analogy between Kierkegaard and the minimal/narrative self distinction. As such, it seems less complicated to follow Rudd’s narrative interpretation, even though he does not recognize this phenomenological distinction between our self-experience as present-tensed selves and temporally extended selves/human beings.

Accordingly, Rudd’s interpretation of $E/O$ and $SUD$ is largely justified, even though his theory of selfhood cannot encompass the whole picture of selfhood as presented in these works. There are clearly many aspects of Kierkegaardian selfhood that can either support or refute such a narrative and teleological interpretation. However, I believe Rudd’s theory of selfhood is well suited in accounting for most of the essential aspects of selfhood in $E/O$ and $SUD$. I would argue that Rudd’s teleological understanding of Kierkegaardian selfhood gives us a well-suited base for comprehending the self-constitutive aspects of such selves, whereas his narrative view elicits the importance of understanding the temporality of Kierkegaardian selves.
Bibliography


