

Article

Taking on the Habit: Kierkegaardian Faith as an Aristotelian Virtue

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Abstract: In this article, we would like to argue that the notion of faith, as seen in the anthropology that Kierkegaard presents in works such as *The Sickness unto Death* or *Postscript*, among others, shows striking similarities with the Aristotelian ethics of virtue. In a more specific manner, we wish to propose that faith can be interpreted as a virtue in the Aristotelian sense since one can find the following three aspects in it: (1) faith is a state based on habit; (2) faith makes human beings good; and (3) faith makes the human being perform her characteristic activity well. In our view, these features correspond to Aristotle's definition of virtue: "If this is so in all cases, the virtue of a human being too will be the state that makes a human being good and makes him perform his characteristic activity well". (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106a).

Keywords: Kierkegaard; Aristotle; virtue; faith; anthropology; ethics of virtue



Citation: Rojas, Fernanda, and Nassim Bravo. 2023. Taking on the Habit: Kierkegaardian Faith as an Aristotelian Virtue. *Religions* 14: 1283. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14101283>

Academic Editors: John Lippitt and C. Stephen Evans

Received: 29 August 2023

Revised: 4 October 2023

Accepted: 9 October 2023

Published: 11 October 2023



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1. Introduction

In this article, we would like to suggest that the notion of faith, as expounded by Kierkegaard, can be interpreted as a virtue in the Aristotelian sense. We wish to show that the anthropological model proposed by Kierkegaard in works such as *The Sickness unto Death* has interesting similarities with Aristotle's anthropology. Both, we would like to argue, have a teleological character, for they understand happiness (or, for Kierkegaard, something that could be argued to be a kind of happiness) as an ultimate or absolute end (*telos*). Also, similarly, both models interpret happiness not as something that one simply has, but as the practical realization of that which is properly human. Although in Aristotle, virtue constitutes the path to that ultimate end, for Kierkegaard, that role is played by faith. Our hope is to show that virtue and faith have further features in common.

Moreover, we hope this analysis can contribute to the exchange between classical studies and Kierkegaard scholarship.¹ Kierkegaard is often confined to the realm of modern thought, and it is assumed that his thought can only be understood in dialogue with other modern traditions such as German idealism.² Source research, on the other hand, while it has offered a more historically accurate interpretation of Kierkegaard's corpus, has the disadvantage of making the Dane too parochial a figure, as it suggests that the real interlocutors of his thought were the local figures of Golden Age Denmark. Although these predominant readings are valuable in their own way, they have also limited the scope of Kierkegaard's work, especially in dialogue with other schools of thought, in this case with Aristotelianism. To be clear, our intention is not to suggest that Kierkegaard was deeply acquainted with Aristotle, much less that he was an Aristotelian. In fact, the documentary evidence shows that in these two respects, the connection between the two thinkers was tenuous at best. Nevertheless, by showing several conceptual similarities between Kierkegaard and Aristotle, we intend to show that there are sufficient elements to establish a serious and solid exchange between the two traditions.

The article is divided into four sections. In Section 1, we examine the connection in the source material between Kierkegaard and Aristotle to determine the extent to which

the former was familiar with the latter's philosophy, especially the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Section 2, we provide an overview of Aristotle's anthropology and his ethics of virtue. More specifically, we analyze the parts of the Aristotelian definition of virtue.

Next, we give an overview of what might be called Kierkegaard's anthropological model. For this, we focus on the anthropological proposal that the pseudonymous Anti-Climacus presents in *The Sickness unto Death*. Finally, in Section 4, we argue that the notion of faith suggested by Kierkegaard has several features in common with the Aristotelian definition of virtue. Concretely, we try to show that (1) faith is a state based on habit; (2) faith makes human beings good; and (3) faith makes the human being perform her characteristic activity well.

2. Kierkegaard and Aristotle

The claim of this article is that there are several important similarities between Kierkegaard's concept of faith, which plays a fundamental role in his anthropology, and Aristotle's virtue ethics.

In a study that suggests a parallelism between two thinkers from different periods and contexts, it is reasonable to start by observing whether the later thinker had access to the ideas of the earlier thinker and then consider the extent to which the former knew these ideas. If such a connection is denied, this might constitute a major objection against the proposed parallelism, or at least it would have to be accepted that the link between the two thinkers, if it exists, would have to be incidental. In this regard, it is often mentioned that Kierkegaard had a superficial knowledge of the philosophy of Aristotle.

Kierkegaard himself admits the limitations of his knowledge of Aristotle. In an entry in his diary JJ, written probably in June 1843, he acknowledges not having read Aristotle, only some Plato (Kierkegaard 2008, p. 212). Naturally, the fact that he had not read Aristotle directly does not necessarily mean that he was unaware of his ideas. On the contrary, it is entirely plausible that someone with Kierkegaard's academic training would have been familiar with the thought of such a historically relevant philosopher.

Some scholars have identified the secondary literature through which Kierkegaard learned about the Greek philosopher's ideas. Arild Waaler claims that one of the main sources for this was *Outline for Lectures on the History of Ancient Philosophy*, a posthumous work by Kierkegaard's friend and mentor, Poul Martin Møller (Waaler 1998, p. 277; Møller 1839–1843). The text was based on the two series of lectures given by Møller at the University of Copenhagen in the winter semesters of 1833–1834 and 1834–1835. It is likely that Kierkegaard attended these lessons and was familiar with their content even before the publication of the volume. This is also perhaps why he called Møller "the interpreter of Aristotle" in the dedication in *The Concept of Anxiety* (Kierkegaard 1980a, p. 5).

Other important sources for Kierkegaard in this regard were the *History of Philosophy* by the renowned historian Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann (1798–1819) and the *History of the Greek Philosophy* by Gotthard Oswald Marbach (1838). However, according to Waaler, Kierkegaard's knowledge of Aristotle was superficial, especially in comparison to his expertise in Plato—which seems to be confirmed by the aforementioned JJ journal entry—and German idealism (Waaler 1998, p. 278). Moreover, it is possible that Kierkegaard did not even read these sources carefully, as can be seen from his misunderstanding of some technical terms, particularly in Tennemann's work (Waaler 1998, p. 279). It is also important to consider that the interpretation of both Møller and Tennemann is very different from our standard interpretation of Aristotle today, a fact that is especially noticeable in the case of the Tennemann, whose Kantian influence is apparent (Løkke and Waaler 2016, pp. 26–27). Finally, Waaler underscores Kierkegaard's tendency to borrow concepts from other thinkers and then employ them for his own purposes, which often involved substantial alterations of the authors' original ideas (Waaler 1998, p. 280). To summarize, Kierkegaard knew Aristotle superficially through a limited number of sources and with the bias of his own intellectual preferences.

Although Waaler's source research is thorough and offers valuable clues for understanding the relationship between Kierkegaard and Aristotle, it also has limitations. Waaler seeks to analyze, among other things, the influence of the Greek philosopher on a specific text by Kierkegaard, namely the "Interlude" in *Philosophical Fragments*. This means that his study is limited to the Aristotle-Kierkegaard relationship up to 1844—the year of the publication of *Philosophical Fragments*—and is reasonably restricted to the area of Aristotelian thought that is relevant to the reading of the "Interlude", i.e., physics and metaphysics. Neither the Kierkegaard of later years nor the discussion of Aristotelian ethics, for example, are taken into consideration. On the other hand, these secondary sources do not exclude the possibility that Kierkegaard had read Aristotle directly after 1843–1844.

In fact, according to documentary sources, Kierkegaard did read and quote Aristotle³ from both Immanuel Bekker's Greek edition, *Aristotle Graece* (Aristotle 1831), and Johan Gottlieb Buhle's Latin edition, *Aristotelis Opera* (Aristotle 1791–1797). He owned both editions in his personal library. He also owned a German translation, *Die Ethik des Aristoteles*, edited by Christian Garve (Aristotle 1798–1801). It is relevant to note that at the time, there was no Danish translation of Aristotle's *Ethics*⁴, which is an indication of the limited influence Aristotelianism had in Denmark.

The fact that Kierkegaard followed three editions in three different languages would seem to indicate that he read the Greek philosopher in some detail, at least in the case of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which presents a sharp contrast to Waaler's claim about the superficiality of Kierkegaard's knowledge. Indeed, there is evidence to show that sometimes he even compared the Greek and German texts (Kierkegaard 2010, p. 385). In this regard, Håvard Løkke suggests that, while it is likely that Kierkegaard obtained most of his knowledge of Aristotle from Tennemann's aforementioned *History of Philosophy*, it is also possible that he read the *Nicomachean Ethics* directly (Løkke 2016, p. 47). This seems to be confirmed in the following entry, in which Kierkegaard offers an overview of the contents of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

It is indeed true that one doesn't always find a rigorous systematic exposition in Aristotle, but there is scarcely anything written by him in which one doesn't sense the systematic thinker, whereas in our time we have plenty of systems in which there isn't a trace of systematic thinking. His *Ethics* is divided into the following sections: books 1–3 on the good, on virtue, and a host of other investigations; books 4–5 on development of the *moral* virtues, i.e., the virtues that have to do with the irrational part of the soul: courage, moderation, generosity ἐλευθεριότης, justice. 6th book on *intellectual virtues*: τέχνη, ἐπιστήμη, σωφροσύνη, νοῦς, σοφία. Here A. no longer uses his comment about the μεσότης of virtue. 7th bk. on abstinence etc., pleasure. 8th book on friendship; 9th book on friendship. 10th book on pleasures. (Kierkegaard 2010, pp. 386–87)

This passage would indeed seem to indicate that Kierkegaard had probably read at least parts of the *Nicomachean Ethics* directly. However, Løkke points out that this reading must have been superficial (Løkke 2016, p. 49). In his view, this can be observed by his lack of attention to key notions of Aristotelian ethics, such as practical wisdom and the concept of choice. Perhaps Kierkegaard saw an essential incompatibility between a classical virtue ethics, with its strong cognitive component, and a Protestant Christian ethics. Løkke does not take a position on this issue, but he mentions an interesting tendency among scholars to associate Kierkegaard with Aristotelian virtue ethics (Løkke 2016, p. 47).⁵ Although he does not deny that there are several ethical similarities between Kierkegaard and Aristotle, it seems unlikely to him that this alleged Aristotelianism would be the result of a direct reading of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a work that does not seem to have particularly impressed Kierkegaard. This thesis seems solid, and, in general terms, we tend to agree. Thus, Kierkegaard may have been an Aristotelian by accident. Incidentally, it is important to note that the entries on Aristotle in Kierkegaard's journals come from the period immediately prior to the publication of *Either/Or* in 1843.

Løkke presents a list of mentions of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in Kierkegaard's corpus: 30 journal entries in total, plus 38 references in *The Concept of Irony*, *Either/Or*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *Postscript*, and *Stages on Life's Way* (Løkke 2016, p. 51).⁶ According to Løkke, these mentions of the *Nicomachean Ethics* focus on two Aristotelian themes that seem to have piqued Kierkegaard's interest: (1) the role of ignorance in human action; and (2) the character of the human being as a social creature. It is interesting to observe that Kierkegaard seemed to have a greater command of the concept of Aristotelian friendship than of other ideas discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He quotes three times *Nicomachean Ethics* 10, 8, where Aristotle discusses divine happiness (a notion that also appears in the *Postscript* and in the first part of *Either/Or*).

The passage most relevant to the issue of virtue and the essence of the human being appears in the following entry, where Kierkegaard talks about self-love, contemplative life, and happiness:

Aristotle also presents love of self as the highest, that is, in the good sense cf. 9.8, 10.7. 'every hum. being's genuine self lies in this part, namely, the intellectual part.' He thus recommends the contemplative life as the highest form of happiness. But happiness is in turn the goal of everything, and [he] defines happiness as an activity that is desirable in itself (cf. 10.6). cf. 10.8 on the happiness of the gods. Here it is easy to see that Aristotle has not understood this self deeply enough; for contemplative thought has entelechy only in an aesthetic sense. And the happiness of the divine doesn't consist in contemplation but in eternal communication. Arist. has not understood the definition of spirit. He therefore still recommends external goods, if only as accompaniment, a drapery; but on this point [he] lacks the category needed to complete the movement. (Kierkegaard 2010, p. 387)

This passage shows that Kierkegaard was aware of Aristotle's discussion of contemplation and human happiness. However, Kierkegaard focuses here on the aspect of (good) self-love in the intellectual life, and he thus chose to dismiss this interpretation of human happiness. In this reading, happiness consists of devoting oneself to intellectual life—that is, to the superior part of the human being's soul—instead of paying attention to the inferior part, the animal soul (bad self-love). Kierkegaard does not approve that, even in the first case, the human being is still bound to external goods. He also claims that Aristotle lacked a notion of spirit, which, of course, is historically correct.

Thus, the statement about the superficial character of Kierkegaard's knowledge of Aristotle is only true to a certain degree. Although Aristotelian philosophy did not occupy a central place in Kierkegaard's readings, as Plato or contemporary German thought did, he undoubtedly knew Aristotle through secondary sources such as Møller or Tennemann. The latter's *History of Philosophy* was a highly influential work at the time, and Tennemann was an interlocutor of thinkers of the stature of Hegel, so it is possible that his interpretation of Aristotle had some impact on the way Kierkegaard perceived the Greek philosopher.

However, Kierkegaard also read Aristotle directly, in particular his *Nicomachean Ethics*. He was aware of the general contents of the work, and there were some passages he read with attention conscientiously, even comparing several translations of the text, which does not seem to indicate superficiality or carelessness. This said, it appears that he was unimpressed by these passages. Does this mean that Kierkegaard has nothing to do with Aristotle's ethical approach? Not necessarily. Kierkegaard's reading of Aristotle concentrates on very specific issues, and it is possible that this interpretation was influenced by some of the secondary literature available. However, the study of the sources shows that the parallel between Kierkegaard's anthropology and Aristotle's ethics, if it existed, should have been incidental.

3. Virtue and Aristotelian Anthropology

Aristotle describes ethical virtue thus: "(...) the virtue of a human being too will be the state that makes a human being good and makes him perform his characteristic activity

well" (Aristotle 2004, 1106a). This definition is composed of several parts that are important to understand. We will analyze these parts in the following:

(1) *Virtue is a state that has its origin in habit or custom* (Aristotle 2004, 1103a). This has several implications. The first is that virtue is not something that happens or is given by nature (Aristotle 2004, 1103a). Human beings are not naturally good; they become good. The definition also explains how this happens. In pointing out that virtue is a state, Aristotle emphasizes its practical character. Just as house builders become builders by building, the just person becomes just by practicing justice (Aristotle 2004, 1103a).

According to Aristotle, if virtue were given by nature and did not require a certain activity, there would be no need for teachers (Aristotle 2004, 1103b). It is necessary to learn to do in the right way the activities that lead to virtue. This becomes clear when one observes the fact that from the same activity, both right and wrong states can be derived: "it is from playing the lyre that people become good and bad lyre-players" (Aristotle 2004, 1103b).

To develop the proper practice of an activity requires constancy, firmness, and to make a choice. This is also a consequence of understanding virtue as a state and not simply as an isolated action, which could occur by chance or by the indication of others (Aristotle 2004, 1105a). The practice of virtue involves a whole life, as can be seen in this famous passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "For one swallow does not make a summer, nor one day. Neither does one day or short time make someone blessed and happy" (Aristotle 2004, 1098a).

Finally, virtue is acquired through choices: "The virtues are rational choices or at any rate involve rational choice" (Aristotle 2004, 1106a). It is important to note that this choice is the product of deliberation rather than will. Aristotle explains that while the end of an action is determined by the will—which always tends toward the good (real or apparent)—the means to achieve this end are chosen with the help of reason and reflection (Aristotle 2004, 1111b–1115a). To summarize, virtue is understood as a state that is neither given by nature nor arises by chance or by an external order but is consolidated through habit and is primarily a rational choice.

(2) *Virtue makes the human being good*. As said, virtue for Aristotle is a state, not a form of theoretical knowledge. This practical emphasis distances him from the Socratic and Platonic tradition. This, however, does not mean that theoretical knowledge is irrelevant. Aristotle claims that virtue is what makes a human being good. To understand how this is possible, it is necessary to understand *theoretically* what good means.

Aristotle begins his reflection on ethics by identifying the good with the end of things: "Every skill and every inquiry, and similarly every action and rational choice, is thought to aim at some Good; and so the good has been aptly described as that at which everything aims" (Aristotle 2004, 1094a). Although there are ends of many kinds, these are distinguished not only in terms of the things of which they are ends—some are the ends of the arts, and others are the ends of the sciences—but also some ends are better than others. Thus, some ends are not sought for their own sake but for the sake of something else.

With this in mind, Aristotle proposes the existence of an ultimate end to which our actions aim and to which all other ends are subordinated. This is the highest good of the human being (Aristotle 2004, 1094a). If virtue makes the human being good, then virtue must be oriented toward that highest good or end. Although it would seem to be a complicated matter to determine what this end is, Aristotle suggests that it is self-evident, for "both the masses and sophisticated people" agree that this is happiness (Aristotle 2004, 1095a).

However, not everyone understands happiness in the same way. For some, happiness consists of leading a voluptuous life, while for others, it lies in politics or contemplation (Aristotle 2004, 1095b). Those who choose the former identify happiness with pleasures, but in doing so, they are reduced to their animal aspect, for they behave like beasts. In the case of the latter, political life, happiness is understood as honor. However, Aristotle states that honor is not as important as the reasons for which honor is conferred; moreover, honor depends on those who bestow it.

Finally, Aristotle rules out that happiness is the possession of wealth. Riches cannot be the ultimate end, for they matter only insofar as they make it possible to obtain something else (Aristotle 2004, 1096a).

Thus, happiness must be something that is sought for its own sake, something that is perfect and sufficient. Aristotle affirms in this respect that the good of each thing resides in its proper function or characteristic activity; the same is true for the supreme end of the human being: “For just as the good—the doing well—of a flute-player, a sculptor or any practitioner of a skill, or generally whatever has some characteristic activity or action, is thought to lie in its characteristic activity, so the same would seem to be true of a human being, if indeed he has a characteristic activity” (Aristotle 2004, 1097b).

The practical character of Aristotle’s analysis of virtue is also seen in his teleological conception of the good. This can be observed, for example, when Aristotle rejects the Platonic view of the idea of the good and questions what use it would be to the carpenter or weaver to know such an idea (Aristotle 2004, 1097a). According to Aristotle, the ultimate end of the human being takes place in the activity or activities peculiar to human beings. To be good, therefore, does not consist of having an idea of the good but of acting in a certain way: “As in the Olympic Games it is not the most attractive and the strongest who are crowned, but those who compete (since it is from this group that winners come), so in life it is those who act rightly who will attain what is noble and good” (Aristotle 2004, 1099a).

(3) *Virtue makes the human being perform her characteristic activity well.* Aristotle begins by saying which activities are not peculiar to human beings, i.e., which are not their exclusive or essential activities. In this analysis, Aristotle presents what might be called his anthropological biology, which is characterized by his description of the parts of the soul.

It is important to note that in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle does not develop in detail his theory of the soul. Nevertheless, what he expounds there coincides with the ideas expressed in other works, particularly *De anima*. If these two works are taken into account, it is possible to understand why Aristotle resorts to a classification of the soul to explain the characteristic activity of the human being. Although the human being is a composite of soul and body (Aristotle 2016, 413a), the soul is the [R3, E] form of the body, i.e., it is what makes an organism what it is (Aristotle 2016, 412b). The soul is also understood as the foundation of the functions or activities characteristic of the human being: “Consequently, the soul is in the primary way that by which we live and perceive and think” (Aristotle 2016, 414a).

Aristotle claims that the soul is the cause and principle of every living body. It is cause and principle in terms of entity since it allows beings to be, i.e., to live. It is the cause of motion, though not in all beings. It is also their final cause, their reason for being, and their perfection (Aristotle 2016, 415b). This teleological aspect is important, for it explains why happiness—which, as discussed, is the ultimate end of the human being according to its characteristic activity—must be found in the part of the soul that is essentially human.

Aristotle divides the soul into two parts: one irrational and the other rational (Aristotle 2004, 1102a). In the former, there is a part that he calls the vegetative faculty. Here is the act of living, as well as nutrition and growth.⁷ These activities are not peculiar to human beings since they are common to all living beings (Aristotle 2004, 1098a).

In the irrational part, there is also the sensitive aspect, which includes passions and appetites. This aspect is also common to all animals. However, in human beings, the sensitive capacity can participate in reason to the extent that passions and appetites can be moderated by rationality, at least in the case of the human being that is continent. If the irrational part that is common to other living beings is discarded, “[w]hat remains is a life, concerned in some way with action, of the element that possesses reason” (Aristotle 2004, 1098a).

If, as discussed, happiness occurs in the characteristic activity of the human being, [E] one might conclude that, to be happy, the human being must act in conformity with the rational aspect of her soul. However, this does not involve a renunciation of the other aspects of the soul. On the contrary, Aristotle presents in *De anima* a hierarchy in which the most basic and common elements of the soul are contained in the higher and more

exclusive ones. Just as the figure of the triangle is contained in that of the square, so the vegetative part is contained in the sensitive (Aristotle 2016, 414b). If one considers the teleological character of the soul, each of its functions is oriented so that each being can fulfill its end; thus, for example, every living being needs nutrition to live, which is its end. Similarly, every being with the capacity to move needs sensation to feed; otherwise, it would not be able to perceive where the food is and would move in vain (Aristotle 2016, 434b). The human being, who is a living being with the capacity to move and think, needs both nutrition and sensation.

After establishing what the characteristic activity of human beings is, Aristotle affirms that virtue is what makes that activity excellent. In other words, it is not only necessary for the human being to perform the activity that is peculiar to it, but it must do this in the best possible way, which means to do it according to the best and most perfect virtue (Aristotle 2004, 1098a). This would involve not only performing one or a certain number of acts but an entire life.

(4) *Other considerations about virtue.* In his anthropological and teleological analysis of virtue, Aristotle distinguishes two types of virtue: ethical and intellectual (Aristotle 2004, 1103a). In both cases, virtue refers to the state in which the human being performs its characteristic activity in the most perfect way, therefore achieving its ultimate end or good, which is happiness.

However, there are important differences between the two types of virtue. The main one is that ethical virtue takes place in the sensitive part of the soul, which participates in the rational part. In other words, here, the characteristic activity of the human being, rational activity, is aimed at controlling its passions, appetites, and desires, as well as the actions that arise from them. Aristotle explains the way in which reason exercises its control over the sensitive part through the doctrine of the *mesotes* or middle ground (Aristotle 2004, 1106b).

This middle ground is not determined with respect to the object of desire or the object of action but with respect to the person acting in a particular circumstance:

For if ten pounds of food is a lot for someone to eat, and two pounds a little, the trainer will not necessarily prescribe six; for this may be a lot or a little for the person about to eat—for Milo, a little, for a beginner at gymnastics, a lot. The same goes for running and wrestling. In this way, every expert in a science avoids excess and deficiency, and aims for the mean and chooses it—the mean, i.e., not in the thing itself but relative to us. (Aristotle 2004, 1106b)

The virtuous human being can find the middle ground in their passions and actions. For example, the virtue of courage is achieved when one conducts oneself habitually, not in an excessively cowardly or reckless manner, but facing fear in its proper measure according to the particular situation (Aristotle 2004, 1107b).

In contrast, the intellectual virtues—which, according to Aristotle, are more perfect—are found in the rational part of the soul. It is not necessary to discuss each of these virtues in detail. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, toward the end of his analysis of virtue, Aristotle discusses the mode of life that is suited to the most perfect of the intellectual virtues, namely wisdom. The exercise of this virtue is the contemplative life, i.e., a life in which the human being devotes himself almost exclusively to the purely rational part of the soul. It is only in this form of life that the purest and most perfect happiness occurs (Aristotle 2004, 1177a).

Interestingly, Aristotle suggests that “Such a life is superior to one that is simply human, because someone lives thus, not in so far as he is a human being, but in so far as there is some divine element within him” (Aristotle 2004, 1177b). As mentioned in the previous section, Kierkegaard seems to reject this idea of contemplative happiness.

However, this pure rationalism is nuanced. The notion of a pure intellectual virtue separate from everything else, such as Aristotle seems to suggest (in a superficial way, for it exceeds the purposes of his inquiry), contrasts with his claim that “human nature is not self-sufficient for contemplation, but the body must be healthy and provided with food

and other care" (Aristotle 2004, 1178b). This seems to indicate that contemplative life is only possible when all parts of the soul, not only the rational one, fulfill their function and purpose.

To summarize, virtue is a state that involves a practice that is the result of habit and rational choice, by which the human being becomes good by performing in an excellent manner its characteristic activity (though in a way it also has a divine element), achieving thus its ultimate end, which is happiness.

4. Kierkegaard's Anthropology in *The Sickness unto Death*

It is a complicated matter to talk about a Kierkegaardian anthropology in the same sense that we speak of an Aristotelian anthropology.⁸ Kierkegaard usually resisted using terms such as "essence" or "nature", and he did not systematically develop an anthropological theory in the way that a classical philosopher such as Aristotle would. This was probably due to what Kierkegaard perceived as the excesses of the systematization of Hegelian philosophy and its claim to reduce the dynamism of human existence to abstract concepts. Indeed, in the *Postscript* of 1846, the pseudonym Johannes Climacus claimed that a system of existence was not possible (Kierkegaard 1992, pp. 118–25).

Nevertheless, Kierkegaard was interested in the condition of the human being, especially in the question of how the individual becomes a Christian, and in most of his books, we find profound reflections on human existence. One work in which Kierkegaard offers a particularly schematic description of what it means to be human is *The Sickness unto Death*. We would like to argue that this characterization allows us to have a clear, if not systematic, idea of what one could call, with some reservations, a Kierkegaardian anthropology.

The Sickness unto Death, published on 30 July 1849 under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus, is commonly said to belong to the period in which Kierkegaard decided to address the question of the ideal of Christianity directly. The title of the work is inspired by the story of Lazarus in the Gospel of John. Upon learning of the illness of his friend Lazarus, Jesus declares that it is not a fatal illness and, consequently, does not go immediately to see him. In the meantime, Lazarus dies, but later, Jesus miraculously raises him from the dead.

With this story, Anti-Climacus wishes to show that natural death is not the endpoint in the Christian's life, i.e., it is not the sickness unto death. The real mortal illness occurs within existence, and it is despair. Despite the gloomy perspective of this existential condition, there is a positive element in despair since it constitutes the stage on which the human being can begin to reach the cure, namely existential fulfillment.⁹ We would like to argue that, according to the anthropological proposal of Anti-Climacus, the individual can only achieve such fulfillment when she lives in accordance with the nature that is proper to her. It seems that the idea that the human being can attain existential completeness—and, as a result of this, happiness¹⁰—through a way of life that is characteristic of her bears a certain resemblance to the Aristotelian theory of virtue.

The first part of *The Sickness unto Death* is composed of three sections: A, B, and C. In Section A, Anti-Climacus discusses the concept of despair, which he identifies as the sickness unto death. In Section B, he attempts to demonstrate that this disease is more widespread than is commonly thought. In C, Anti-Climacus presents his classification of the forms of despair, first according to the categories of finitude/infinity and possibility/necessity and then according to the level of consciousness one has of being in despair. Finally, in the second part of the work, despair is interpreted from a Christian point of view as sin.

The main idea of the book is that despair is the real sickness unto death, and Anti-Climacus states that despair consists of a failure to become oneself. However, the despairing individual cannot remove her own self since the self is eternal. It is important to note here that *The Sickness unto Death* is developed within a Christian interpretive framework, which is evident in its subtitle: *A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening* (Kierkegaard 1980b, p. 1). Thus, Anti-Climacus simply assumes things such as the immortality of the soul, the existence of God, and the fact that humans are created

beings. At first glance, this would seem to suggest that the theory of Anti-Climacus could only be useful or of interest to a Christian believer or to someone willing to admit these premises as true. However, careful observation reveals that this Christian framework does not necessarily affect the conceptual soundness of Anti-Climacus' anthropological theory, just as the classical and Hellenic context does not constitute an impediment to recognizing the value of Aristotelian philosophy.

From the beginning of the book, the pseudonymous author uses the term "spirit" to refer to the human being; the human self is the same as the spirit (Kierkegaard 1980b, p. 13). Understood in this way, the human being is characterized by its capacity to reflect on itself¹¹ and by its dynamic character: "The self is a relation that relates to itself or is the relation's relating to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating to itself" (Kierkegaard 1980b, p. 13).

Furthermore, Anti-Climacus claims that the human being is a synthesis between the infinite and the finite, between temporality and eternity, and between freedom and necessity. This dialectical structure means that the human individual is a complex being who is connected to the finite and temporal through the senses but who can relate to the infinite and eternal through thought and ideas. Although it is theoretically possible to consider the human being statically only from one side of this dialectical relation (for example, only from its material aspect, if one thinks of the human being as just another part of the physical world or only from its infinite aspect, as something beyond the physical), this condition is dynamic and is in constant movement: "every moment that a self exists, it is in a process of becoming" (Kierkegaard 1980b, p. 30). In other words, the human being is never only finite/temporal or only infinite/eternal.

Finally, this anthropological scheme is not a closed model but considers the relationship of the individual with the *other*: "The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another" (Kierkegaard 1980b, pp. 13–14). Within the Christian framework of *The Sickness unto Death*, that "other" is God, the creator of the human self. The point here is that this relation to God is necessary because the human self is essentially a created being. In reality, however, the self can try to ground itself in something other than God—something like wealth, career achievements, or other worldly goods—which leads to despair.

As has been said, in the first part of *The Sickness unto Death*, Anti-Climacus describes the forms of despair according to the parts of the synthesis that make up the human self. Despair happens when the individual sees herself only from the point of view of one of the parts of the synthesis without considering the other. This one-sided position amounts, for Anti-Climacus, to a denial of one's own self, for the human being is a synthesis, and to reject one of its parts is the same as denying oneself. In an anthropological sense, the consequence of this is that the human being cannot achieve existential fulfillment.

For example, if the individual concentrates on the infinite part of the synthesis—through, for example, an excessive religiosity or a volatile imagination—she forgets that her human condition also involves a finite part, namely her physical and natural aspects. By deciding to ignore one of the parts that is proper to her, the individual can no longer reach her full potential. From an anthropological point of view, this might be compared to the Aristotelian claim according to which the human being can only reach their realization, and thus their happiness, when they perform the activity that is proper to their nature.

In this context, it follows that the way out of despair, which is not to will to be oneself, would consist of embracing what one is, i.e., a synthesis. This would mean acknowledging that one is composed of opposites in dialectical tension and then trying to relate to oneself adequately and, as a result of this, find a balance or harmony between the opposites. To exist in this way would be tantamount, to put it in Aristotelian terms, to living in accord with one's nature.

After describing the forms of despair according to the parts of the synthesis, Anti-Climacus offers a classification in which the criterion is the consciousness that the individual has of being in despair (Kierkegaard 1980b, pp. 42–74). In this second formulation, the

lowest form of despair is that of one who is unaware of being in despair. We note here a peculiar use of the term “despair”. We usually understand despair as a psychological ailment—a severe depression, for example—that is clearly visible such that it would seem contradictory to speak of being in despair without being aware of it. Anti-Climacus, however, interprets despair differently. It is important to remember here that despair consists in not to will to be oneself. Thus, a person who does not know her own “nature” or condition—namely that of being a synthesis—might try to live one-sidedly according to her finite aspect—devoting herself, for example, to the satisfaction of her physical pleasures or the pursuit of wealth—putting aside her infinite and eternal part. In this situation, it might occur that the person living this way leads an outwardly successful life or even thinks that she is happy, but the underlying condition would be that of despair since there is an misrelation in the synthesis.

We observe that, although the cognitive element is obviously important in despair understood according to the level of consciousness, it is not the most decisive factor. To be more or less aware of despair means, for Anti-Climacus, that the individual is closer or further away from being cured of this illness. She who is unaware of being in despair is further away from the cure; she who is conscious of this is closer to freeing herself from this condition, although her suffering might be more intense (Kierkegaard 1980b, p. 42). However, the cause of despair is not strictly speaking the knowledge that one has of it, but the misrelation of the self and, consequently, her failure to act in accordance with her nature.

For example, in the first form of conscious despair, which Anti-Climacus calls the despair of not willing to be oneself, the individual knows that she is despairing, but her despair is oriented toward something mundane. Faced with the loss of some earthly object she considers valuable, such as a job or a good reputation in society, the individual despairs and would like not to be herself. Instead, she would prefer to change places with someone who has not suffered such a loss or who possesses abundant earthly goods. Her despair does not depend on whether she is aware of it, but neither on the loss of the desired material object. The real cause is the misrelation, in this case, the one-sided orientation towards a mere earthly existence, a state in which she forgets her infinite or eternal side.

To summarize, Anti-Climacus suggests that the human being is a dynamic relation of opposing elements in dialectical tension. He uses the term spirit to refer to this. In this theory, a good life, so to speak, would consist of balancing in existence the parts of the synthesis. The opposite is what the pseudonymous author calls despair: not to will to be oneself or, in other words, rejecting one’s own nature.

In this context, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the way to avoid despair would have to do with the individual becoming aware of her condition as a synthesis and, with this knowledge, living accordingly. One might think that it would be a matter of the individual deciding to take charge of her existence and begin to live harmoniously. In this way, the individual would reach existential fulfillment. However, this is only partially true.

It is necessary to underscore that, in the proposal of Anti-Climacus, the human individual is a being created by God. Since this creature character is essential to the human being, it can only attain its perfection by relating itself properly to its creator: “The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it” (Kierkegaard 1980b, p. 14). In fact, the imbalance in the relation of the synthesis to itself also entails an imbalance in the relation to the power that has established the synthesis, i.e., God. This means that, without a correct relationship with God, the individual will not be able to achieve the existential equilibrium that has been discussed up to this point. The transparent relationship with God can only occur through faith, which is the subject of the following section.

5. Faith as an Aristotelian Virtue

The claim that a religious-Christian quality such as faith can be understood as a virtue in the classical sense might seem bold. Sylvia Walsh (2018) has reasonably objected not only that Kierkegaard tends not to use the term virtue [*Dyd*] when describing faith but that the differences between the Christian spiritual qualities he discusses and the pagan virtues are too many to be equated. Perhaps the most important difference is that while the latter are developed by the individual, the former are God-given (and freely accepted by the individual). Rather than a virtue ethicist, Walsh suggests that Kierkegaard is a character ethicist. Robert C. Roberts (2019, 2022), in contrast, argues that while Walsh is right that Kierkegaard cannot technically be considered a virtue ethicist as we understand this expression today (specifically, in the neo-Aristotelian-Thomist sense of the term), he could be a virtue ethicist in the classical sense—like a Socrates or an Aristotle—since Kierkegaard is also interested in the improvement of individual character.

Both Walsh's and Roberts' arguments are convincing and have merit. However, our objective is not to determine whether Kierkegaard was an ethicist of virtue or whether faith can technically be considered an Aristotelian virtue. We are interested in establishing a framework in which it is possible to develop a dialogue between the classical tradition and Kierkegaard's thought. We understand Kierkegaard's Christian and modern context to be qualitatively different from that of classical antiquity. Consequently, we have no problem admitting that faith—or, for that matter, any of the Christian qualities discussed by Kierkegaard—is not an Aristotelian virtue. However, if these technical differences were everything, any dialogue between traditions would be impossible. Thus, our hope is simply to examine whether it is possible to interpret faith, as expounded by Kierkegaard, as an Aristotelian virtue.

Aristotle, as we have seen, describes virtue as “the state that makes a human being good and makes him perform his characteristic activity well” (Aristotle 2004, 1106a). In the third section of this article, we tried to examine each part of this definition. In that analysis, we underscored the following characteristics: (1) *Virtue is a state that has its origin in habit or custom*; (2) *virtue makes the human being good*; and (3) *virtue makes the human being perform her characteristic activity well*. We would like to argue that faith, as Kierkegaard understands it, shares these three characteristics and, therefore, might be interpreted as an Aristotelian virtue.

(1) *Faith, like virtue, is a state that is obtained through habit*. To state that faith in Kierkegaard can be obtained through habit might seem problematic,¹² because the Dane underscores in several passages the meaninglessness of faith based on habit or custom, understood as a banal, dispassionate repetition and, therefore, lacking in spirituality (Kierkegaard 1992, pp. 47, 340, 364). However, we believe that the concept of habit in Aristotle is much more than a simple routine action. This is explained in the features with which Aristotle describes virtue as habit, which we outlined before. Our hope in this section is to show how some of these features can also be found in Kierkegaard's notion of faith.

Aristotle claims that virtue is not something given by nature; human beings are not born good but become good. Virtue is something acquired. In the case of faith, something similar happens. The individual is not born a Christian but becomes a Christian. This is because faith is not a natural attribute that one has from birth but that the individual obtains it in the course of his life. This is an idea of which Kierkegaard was highly critical. He was opposed to the idea that faith could be obtained only by being born in a Christian state (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 41) or that it could be understood as a “heritage” from centuries of Christian history (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 26; 1992, pp. 46–49).

In *Philosophical Fragments*, Johannes Climacus suggests that faith, understood as the condition for understanding the truth that provides eternal happiness, is given by God to human beings at the moment of their creation. However, this initial faith is lost as soon as sin appears (Kierkegaard 1985, p. 15). To recover it, God must give the condition again (Kierkegaard 1985, pp. 62–63), and then the individual freely chooses whether to accept it

or not. Faith, as we will explain later, requires a choice, and thus, it is not possible to have it from birth.¹³

Virtue, for Aristotle, has a practical character. A person obtains the habit of justice by performing just actions (Aristotle 2004, 1103a), just as a builder acquires his art by constructing buildings. In this sense, knowing the concept of justice or possessing theoretical knowledge about construction is not as important as practical experience. In this respect, too, faith resembles virtue. For Kierkegaard, faith has more to do with practice than with theoretical knowledge.

The reason for this is related to the character of Christianity. In *Philosophical Fragments*, Johannes Climacus explains that the object of faith is a paradox (Kierkegaard 1985, p. 62), i.e., the contradiction of the eternal becoming historical, of God becoming human. Paradox, as such, cannot be known or understood, so faith cannot be a form of knowledge. In this context, it seems that faith has more to do with an action, namely the acceptance of paradox. Johannes Climacus underscores this issue in the *Postscript*. There, he argues that Christianity cannot be a mere objective truth; it is instead a historical, objective truth that is subjectively appropriated and that involves the existence of the one who relates to it (Kierkegaard 1992, pp. 227, 230, 252, 274), which in turn means that the individual must take an *active* position.

Thus, the truth of Christianity has nothing to do with theories—what Johannes Climacus calls demonstrations *sub specie aeterni*—but takes place in the life of the one who, through faith, appropriates this truth (Kierkegaard 1992, p. 227). Just as, for Aristotle, a carpenter does not become better as a carpenter by knowing the idea of the good, in a similar way, Kierkegaard suggests that there is no point in finding objective truth if such truth is indifferent to one's own life (Kierkegaard 2007, p. 19). Faith, like virtue, has a direct impact on the life of the one who possesses it.

The habit that leads to virtue requires constancy. Faith, similarly, also requires constant practice. It is not enough to decide to believe once and for all, but this choice must be constantly and mindfully reaffirmed. Since the object of faith is a paradox, which cannot be understood and assimilated by reason, doubt is always a possibility. Faced with the contradictory fact of the God–man, the individual can at any moment change her position and become outraged. Therefore, the faith that chooses to believe in the paradox cannot be an isolated act but must be reaffirmed throughout life.

Finally, faith, like virtue, involves making a choice. In *Practice in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus states that in faith, the individual must choose “whether he will believe what he [Jesus] claimed to be, that he was God, or he will not believe” (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 29). It is important to underscore that this choice cannot be made using theoretical or rational arguments since reason indicates that the figure of Christ constitutes an absurdity. The choice of faith is made from the passion of inwardness.¹⁴

At first glance, there seems to be an important difference here between Kierkegaard and Aristotle. For the latter, the choice that leads to virtue must be rational or, at least, must involve reason; for the former, on the other hand, the choice has to do with passion, which is usually interpreted as non-rational. However, it is necessary to consider that the idea of passion means different things in the classical context and the modern context. For classical Greek philosophers, pathos refers to the emotional sphere; it is an affectation that is passively received. For Kierkegaard—and for modern thought—pathos is not something merely emotional or passive but has to do with an active awareness of subjectivity.

Moreover, it is not accurate to say that faith in Kierkegaard supposes a complete abandonment of rationality.¹⁵ Reason sees the paradoxical character of Christianity and indicates the impossibility of assimilating it theoretically and objectively. It is in the face of this paradox that the individual must decide between scandal or faith. This shows that reason, in a way, prepares the way for faith, for, as Anti-Climacus suggests in *Practice in Christianity*, the individual only has genuine faith when he has been confronted with the possibility of scandal (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 143). In any case, while it is true that faith, like

virtue, requires a choice, it is also clear that, here, reason does not play as important a role as in Aristotelian *proairesis*.

(2) *Faith, like virtue, makes human being good.* As discussed earlier, the good in Aristotelian philosophy is the end to which all things tend (Aristotle 2004, 1094a). Aristotle further argues that there is a supreme good that is the ultimate end of the human being, so all her actions and choices are directed to that end. Thus, when it is said that virtue makes the human being good, this actually means that virtue directs the human being to the acquisition of this supreme good. Finally, Aristotle concludes that everyone agrees that this supreme good is happiness (Aristotle 2004, 1095a).

Here, we would like to argue that faith also makes human beings good in the sense that it helps them to attain their ultimate end, which, for Kierkegaard, is also happiness. The difficulty lies in determining what happiness is since people usually interpret happiness differently. As we have seen, Aristotle shows how some people think that happiness is the same as pleasure, wealth, or honors, but the Greek philosopher immediately refutes these beliefs by arguing that these are imperfect goods, either because they are not proper to human beings or because they are means subordinated to higher ends. Happiness, on the other hand, must be something to be sought for its own sake. According to Aristotle, this supreme good consists of practicing in an excellent way the activity that is characteristic of human beings.

An important question here is to examine what Kierkegaard means by happiness.¹⁶ The term most frequently employed by the Danish writer to refer to happiness is *salighed*. Unlike other Danish words that also allude to a certain bliss or joy, such as *lykke* or the adjective *glad*, *salighed* possesses a greater potency, often accompanied by a religious overtone. Indeed, *salighed* could also be translated as “beatitude”, “bliss” or even “salvation” (Glenn 1997, p. 253).

Although the Christian character of this use of the term would seem to indicate that Kierkegaardian “beatitude” would be something completely different from Aristotelian happiness, this distance seems to shorten when we see that, in the *Postscript*, Johannes Climacus refers to happiness as the “supreme good” (Kierkegaard 1992, pp. 387, 426, 428) or “absolute telos”, (Kierkegaard 1992, pp. 385, 393–94, 397) expressions which, as we have discussed, Aristotle uses to describe happiness. Moreover, happiness, Johannes Climacus claims, must be willed for its own sake since it is an absolute end (Kierkegaard 1992, p. 394), unlike other relative and finite ends, such as wealth, which are willed as a means to something else. Indeed, Climacus argues that it is more important how happiness is desired—namely in an absolute way—than trying to describe what it is (Kierkegaard 1992). In any case, the distinction between absolute ends and relative ends shows a strong resemblance to Aristotelian philosophy.

For our discussion, however, it is important to try to explain what happiness is for Kierkegaard. In fact, Johannes Climacus himself seems to offer an answer in this regard. In *Philosophical Fragments*, he proposes the following question: can eternal happiness [*evig Salighed*] be based on historical knowledge? (Kierkegaard 1985, p. 1) According to him, eternal happiness depends on a truth that no human being possesses and has even lost the condition to attain it. (Kierkegaard 1985) It is the truth of Christianity, which God reveals to human beings, allowing them access to it through Christ. Thanks to the figure of Christ, God approaches human beings in their temporal existence. This is the historical starting point of eternal happiness: the encounter between Christ and the individual through faith.

In Johannes Climacus’ proposal, then, happiness depends on a truth, Christ, which is only accessible through faith. Faith is necessary because, as mentioned, the figure of Christ constitutes a paradox that cannot be assimilated by reason: the contradiction of the eternal introduced into the temporal. In this way, it could be argued that faith, like the Aristotelian virtue, helps the human being to attain his ultimate end, which is happiness.

(3) *Faith, like virtue, makes the human being perform her characteristic activity well.* Happiness, for Aristotle, has to do with the practice of the human being’s characteristic activity, which corresponds, for the most part, to the action of the rational part of the soul. The

concept presented by Johannes Climacus seems to be very different. Although in the *Postscript* he interprets happiness as an ultimate end, an idea that seems to be inspired by Aristotle's philosophy, his description of happiness as the encounter between the individual and Christ does not seem to have much in common with the Aristotelian theory.

The religious and Christian character of Climacus' concept of happiness would seem to suggest a supernatural state and, in that sense, something disconnected from the properly human. However, here, it is important to consider the anthropological model presented in *The Sickness unto Death*. There, it is stated that the human being is a dynamic synthesis between finitude/infinity and necessity/possibility. The characteristic of the human in this scheme would consist of relating properly with oneself and thus finding a balance between the opposite parts of the synthesis. It is thus that the individual can reach her existential fullness. In this sense, if someone were to interpret happiness as a complete renunciation of earthly life to dwell only in the eternal, this would be just as inadequate for a human being as if happiness were understood as the simple enjoyment of bodily pleasures.

For Anti-Climacus, as stated earlier, to lean unilaterally toward one of the opposite parts of the synthesis is not to will to be oneself. This is what he calls being in despair. In this context, faith plays a fundamental role. In the second part of *The Sickness unto Death*, Anti-Climacus claims that despair is *sin* (Kierkegaard 1980b, p. 77) and that the opposite of despair is faith (Kierkegaard 1980b, p. 49). Indeed, he associates being cured of despair by faith with "Christian bliss [*Salighed*]" (Kierkegaard 1980b, p. 15).

The individual alone cannot establish this adequate relation in the self. This is because the human being is essentially a created being. It is not enough for the self to relate to itself; it must also relate to the power that created it, i.e., God, and the correct way to establish this second relationship is through faith. This means that the human being can only perform what one might call her characteristic activity with faith. Although the individual in despair does not want to be herself, the person with faith chooses herself, i.e., she accepts her own nature and embraces that which is proper to her. Just as the paradox of Christianity can only be accepted by faith, similarly, the difficulties of existence can only be successfully faced when the individual has faith that for God, everything is possible. Just as faith allows the encounter with the irreconcilable absolute paradox of God-made man, so it is faith that, in the face of anxiety and despair, allows the individual to launch herself into the realization of the synthesis that she is.

6. Conclusions

Traditional scholarship has interpreted Kierkegaard's thought in various ways. One of the most frequent is to place him in the context of modern philosophy, almost always as a rival to what Kierkegaard called "speculative thought", which is commonly associated with Hegelianism. A predictable consequence of this position is that the Dane appears as a "non-systematic" thinker, which can also be understood in different, sometimes radical, ways. Thus, for example, in this reading, we might find a fideist and anti-rationalist author, but also the champion of the individual and subjective thought. In this interpretation, any passage that seems too "conceptual", "abstract", or "systematic" is immediately dismissed as an ironic remark by Kierkegaard.

More recently, source research revealed that Kierkegaard's work was more local in character than previously thought. These studies showed that Kierkegaard's real interlocutors were not Hegel or German idealism but Danish Hegelians such as Heiberg or Martensen, as well as other important local figures in the Copenhagen intellectual sphere. Although this interpretation sketched a more accurate picture of the historical Kierkegaard, it also reduced him to an excessively parochial figure. One of the limitations of source research is that it considerably reduced the potential of Kierkegaardian thought, sometimes resulting in its interest being restricted to Danish studies or the history of thought.

This does not mean, of course, that these interpretations are simply incorrect or that they do not make valuable contributions to scholarship. In our view, however, this has limited the dialogue between Kierkegaard's thought and other philosophical traditions. In

this context, it seems reasonable that analytic philosophy, for example, looks at Kierkegaard with suspicion, regarding him, at best, more as a literary or religious writer than as a philosopher or, at worst, as an irrationalist fanatic. Similarly, from the point of view of classical studies—such as Aristotelianism—it may not seem worthwhile to examine the work of a writer who, according to these traditional interpretations, apparently felt nothing but contempt and aversion for overly theoretical or conceptual philosophical theories.

In this paper, we have attempted to offer an interpretation of faith in Kierkegaard from the perspective of Aristotelian virtue ethics. Our hope is to have shown that although Kierkegaard's writings may seem fragmentary and that he insisted that his thought was not systematic, it is possible to find conceptual soundness in his ideas and enough common ground to establish a dialogue with the Aristotelian tradition. To be clear, this does not constitute a refutation of the other interpretations mentioned. Nor do we mean to suggest that Kierkegaard had a deep knowledge of Aristotle's philosophy, let alone that he was an Aristotelian. However, we believe that using classical thought, and in particular Aristotle's philosophy, to read Kierkegaard's work opens up several interesting possibilities (such as, perhaps, an existential virtue ethics or a new anthropological model), which would otherwise remain closed if we were to restrict ourselves blindly and dogmatically to traditional interpretations.

Author Contributions: Formal analysis, F.R. and N.B.; investigation, F.R. and N.B.; writing—original draft preparation, N.B.; writing—review and editing, F.R. and N.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: We owe a debt of gratitude to the Universidad Panamericana. We would like to thank in particular Nicolás Esparza and Mariana Herrera for their continuous encouragement and help.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ To be clear, there has been a fruitful discussion on Kierkegaard's connection with virtue studies and, to a degree, Aristotle, particularly after the publication of [Davenport and Rudd \(2001\)](#), *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*. See, for example, [Lillegard \(2002\)](#), [Rudd \(2008\)](#), [Stack \(1974\)](#), [Davenport and Rudd \(2001\)](#), [Evans \(2004\)](#), [Compaijen \(2011\)](#), [Fremstedal \(2014, 2015\)](#), [Lippitt \(2017\)](#), [Walsh \(2018\)](#), [Lundsgaard-Leth \(2021\)](#), and [Roberts \(2022\)](#).
- ² However, there are notable exceptions that ought to be mentioned. See, for example, [Howland \(2006\)](#), [Muench \(2007\)](#), and [Muench \(2009\)](#), who have done extensive work on the relationship between Kierkegaard and Socrates.
- ³ For more detailed information about Kierkegaard's sources on Aristotle, see [Nun \(2016\)](#).
- ⁴ Niels Møller's Danish edition would not be published until 1936. See [Aristotle \(1936\)](#).
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 50. Løkke mentions, in particular, the work by [Davenport \(2002\)](#), *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre*.
- ⁶ In his list, Løkke omits a *Nicomachean Ethics* reference in *The Concept of Anxiety*: "What is said of the law is also true of ethics: it is a disciplinarian that demands, and by its demands only judges but does not bring forth life. Only Greek ethics made an exception, and that was because it was not ethics in the proper sense but retained an esthetic factor. This appears clearly in its definition of virtue and in what Aristotle frequently, also in *Ethica Nicomachea*, states with amiable Greek naiveté, namely, that virtue alone does not make a man happy and content, but he must have health, friends, and earthly goods and be happy in his family" ([Kierkegaard 1980a](#), pp. 16–17).
- ⁷ In *De anima*, Aristotle adds reproduction to the functions of the vegetative soul. See [Aristotle \(2016, 415b\)](#).
- ⁸ Despite this, Kierkegaard's anthropology in *The Sickness unto Death* has been abundantly discussed by scholars. See, for example, [Glenn \(1987\)](#), [Hannay \(1987, 1996\)](#), [Grøn \(1997\)](#), [Lundsgaard-Leth \(2018\)](#), and [Jøker Bjerre \(2022\)](#).

- ⁹ To be sure, Anti-Climacus claims, as will be discussed later, that the opposite of despair—and thus its cure—is faith. It is through faith that the human self establishes a proper relation with God, which one could argue is its existential goal. It is thus that we thought it adequate to speak of “existential fulfillment”, an expression that Anti-Climacus does not use.
- ¹⁰ It may come as a surprise to suggest that for Kierkegaard, happiness is a kind of ultimate end when, as is known, faith and Christian blessedness [*Salighed*] involve a willingness to suffer, which does not seem to harmonize with our usual idea of happiness. However, Kierkegaard, like Aristotle, distinguishes between genuine blessedness and the worldly notions of happiness. We will discuss in detail the notion of *Salighed* in Kierkegaard in Section 5.
- ¹¹ Jon Stewart suggests that this self-reflective, dialectical character of the human self was inspired by Hegel’s philosophy. See Stewart (2021, pp. 193–94). For a more detailed discussion of Hegel’s influence on the composition of *The Sickness unto Death*, see Stewart (1997; 2003, pp. 550–67).
- ¹² As Carlisle (2014) suggests.
- ¹³ It is important to note here that faith, unlike Aristotelian virtue, demands that it is another (i.e., God) who assists the individual for faith to be possible. This stands in contrast with Aristotelian virtue, which occurs primarily through human effort. However, this does not deny the active role that the individual has in the development of her faith. This makes it justifiable to claim that faith is not something given by nature.
- ¹⁴ Kierkegaard discusses faith as pathos in works like *Fear and Trembling*, *Philosophical Fragments*, and *Postscript*.
- ¹⁵ Like Penelhum (2010), who argues that Kierkegaard was a radical fideist.
- ¹⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the concept of happiness in Kierkegaard, see Olivares Bøgeskov (2015, 2016).

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