

Movement, Motion

Movement, Motion [*Bevægelse* — noun; *bevæge* — verb]

Derived from the early-modern Danish *bevægelse*, the lexical meaning varies from locomotion, or changes of place, to passive and active psychological changes, including feelings, moods, emotions, and changes of mind or belief. *Bevægelse* can also refer to several kinds of cultural movements like the change of political opinions of a group, revolutionary and reformational movements as well religious movements (often associated with spiritual affection).¹

I. Movement in the Authorship: An Overview

“Motion” and “Movement,” their conceptual cognates (like “change”), and related concepts (like “transition,” “leap,” and “becoming”) are important categories in Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous and signed writings. The most sustained discussions of motion and movement are scattered throughout the seven-year period of pseudonymous writing. Nearly every major entry in the pseudonymous literature, including *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *Repetition* (1843), *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), and *The Sickness Unto Death* (1850), features some treatment of the concept of movement.

To appreciate the importance of movement and related concepts in Kierkegaard, one may look no further than a journal entry written sometime in 1842 or 1843. He states, “The category to which I intend to trace everything...is motion (*kinēsis*), which is perhaps one of the most difficult problems in philosophy. In modern philosophy it has been given another expression—

¹ *Ordbog over det Danske Sprog*, vols. 1-28, published by Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1918-56, vol. 2.

namely, transition and mediation.”² Not only does this fairly early entry place the category of motion at the core of his project, it also sets the notion apart from the Hegelian idea of the mediation of relative opposites, a juxtaposition that is also drawn by Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*, Vigilius Haufniensis in *Concept of Anxiety*, and Johannes Climacus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.³ Another journal entry from the same period pits motion against this Hegelian theme by again referring to *kinēsis*, but this time Kierkegaard favorably names Aristotle as a potential source of critique against Hegelian mediation: “Hegel has never done justice to the category of transition. It would be significant to compare it with the Aristotelian teaching about *kinēsis*.”⁴ Kierkegaard’s concept of motion, then, is integral to his project overall, and, in addition, he draws on Aristotle’s theory of *kinesis* as a wellspring to criticize Hegelian mediation.⁵

The significance of the concept of motion in the authorship can be further determined by considering how Kierkegaard understood his task as a religious author. In *On My Work as an Author* (1851), Kierkegaard states that his authorship was from the very beginning religious, and that he employed his pseudonyms to orient and compel individuals to turn inward and reflect upon their own existential situation with regard to Christianity. From the earliest pseudonymous writings to his personally signed ones, Kierkegaard’s authorship describes the movement

from “the poet,” from the esthetic—*from* “the philosopher,” from the speculative—to the indication of the most inward qualification of the essentially Christian; **from** the pseudonymous *Either/Or*, **through** *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, with my name as editor, **to** *Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*... This movement was traversed or

² *JP* 5, 5601.

³ See *SKS* 3, 93 / *FT*, 42; *SKS* 4, 351 / *CA*, 81-82 and *SKS* 7, 88-89 / *CUP1*, 109-110.

⁴ *JP* 1, 260.

⁵ For a detailed discussion of Kierkegaard’s employment of *kinēsis* in his critique of Hegelianism, see my “Contingency, Necessity, and Causation in Kierkegaard’s Theory of Change,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, vol. 20 (1), 2012, pp. 141-162. Also, see my “Contradiction, Opposition, and Mediation in Kierkegaard’s Critique of Hegel” *Heythrop Journal*, vol. 53 (1), 2012, pp. 24-35, for an account of Kierkegaard’s critique of Hegelian mediation.

delineated *uno tenore*, in one breath, if I dare say so—thus, the authorship, regarded as a *totality*, is religious from first to last.⁶

According to his stated intentions, then, Kierkegaard's authorship describes existential *movement* to Christian existence. He describes this movement as an *inward* movement because Christian faith involves intensification of *self-consciousness*.⁷ The self-movement into and of inwardness takes place from aesthetic existence, where the individual engages and interprets life by means of the categories of fortune and misfortune⁸, the interesting and the boring⁹, pleasure and displeasure¹⁰, to the ethical life, where the self becomes conscious of and *struggles* to concretely and temporally exemplify the universal demands of the good by choosing to be an agent bound by ethical categories (good and evil, for example)¹¹, to religiousness, whereby the self learns that she is not able to concretely and temporally exemplify eternal demands on her own, but only through a God-relationship.¹² For Kierkegaard, the highest pitch of religious existence involves coming "*to oneself in self-knowledge and before God as nothing before him, yet infinitely, unconditionally engaged.*"¹³

II. Definition and General Characteristics of Movement

While Kierkegaard's authorship is principally devoted to urging the single individual to make the inward movement to religious existence, it behooves the reader to understand the *nature* of this movement. The majority of references to movement and its cognates in the literature appear to *presuppose* a theoretical understanding of the notion but they do not feature anything like a

⁶SKS 13, 494-495 / *POV*, 5-6.

⁷SKS 11, 192 / *SUD*, 80.

⁸SKS 7, 376 / *CUPI*, 433

⁹SKS 1, 257-258 / *EOI*, 285-286.

¹⁰SKS 1, 71 / *EOI*, 90; SKS 2, 163 / *EO2*, 179.

¹¹SKS 2, 153-154 / *EO2*, 169; SKS 7, 498 / *CUPI*, 572

¹²SKS 7, 401 / *CUPI*, 461.

¹³SKS 12, 386 / *JFY*, 104. Italics original.

definition. However, Kierkegaard provides an analysis of the concept of motion and change in a few places. The most sustained philosophical exploration of motion appears in the “Interlude” of *Philosophical Fragments*. There Johannes Climacus renders a difficult argument to support his position that beliefs about the past are an “expression of the will.”¹⁴ The epistemological conclusions Climacus draws about historical beliefs, however, are buttressed by a metaphysical account of the nature of the past. Because what was once present but now is past came into existence, Climacus’ theoretical account of the nature of the past includes a metaphysical account of coming into existence in general.

In the first section of the “Interlude” Climacus argues that movement is a “change of coming into existence,” and consistent with Kierkegaard’s journal entries, he identifies the change of coming into existence with the Aristotelian notion of *kinēsis*. Climacus defines *kinēsis* as a “transition from possibility to actuality.”¹⁵ He envisions possibility and actuality as modes of being or existence: “[b]ut such a being that nevertheless is a non-being is possibility, and a being that is being is indeed actual being or actuality, and the change of coming into existence is the transition from possibility to actuality.”¹⁶ Thus, the change of coming into existence consists of the movement from something’s being possible to its being actual.

The broadly Aristotelian definition of movement that Climacus is keenly happy to employ in the “Interlude” should not illude the reader. Aristotle’s analysis of motion in his *Physics* is principally geared toward an explanation of physical change, particularly locomotion. While Climacus’ definition of motion covers natural or generic changes (including locomotion,

¹⁴ *SKS* 4, 247 / *PF*, 83. His argument for this position is not the subject of the current topic. For a discussion of the larger issues pertaining to Climacus’ conclusion, see my “Contingency, Necessity, and Causation in Kierkegaard’s Theory of Change,” in addition to “Cause and Effect” in this volume.

¹⁵ *SKS* 4, 237 / *PF*, 74.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

but also changes of quantity and quality, as well as substantial changes¹⁷), he is, in particular, interested in clarifying the movement the self initiates in ethical and religious inwardness. Despite this important difference, Climacus' concept of motion retains a couple of important Aristotelian characteristics of *kinēsis* that warrant attention.

First, Climacus notes that the transition from the possible to the actual is a kind of *suffering*.¹⁸ When possibility gives way to actuality possibility is *annihilated*. Climacus writes, “All coming into existence is a suffering [*Liden*]...namely, that the possible (not merely the possible that is excluded but even the possibility that is accepted) turns out to be nothing the moment it becomes actual, for possibility is annihilated by actuality.”¹⁹ If two courses of action are possible for an agent, and one is chosen, the chosen one is no longer merely possible. It has come into existence, has been made actual. By choosing the one, the human agent excludes the other.²⁰

Second, most of the pseudonymous writers conceive of the possibility to bring about a change or action as in some way *immanent* to the agent.²¹ That is, the possibility of some interior change or movement is inherent in the individual who seeks to bring about a certain state of affairs through her choice. For example, if an agent chooses to marry, dutifully repeats the marriage vow, and daily lives out her existence in conscious and loving commitment to her

¹⁷ Cf. *JP* 5, 5977.

¹⁸ For Aristotle's gloss on the annihilation of potentiality in motion, see *Physics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, trans. by R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), Book III.1, 201b.9-11. (Henceforth *Physics*.) “Take for instance the buildable: the actuality of the buildable as buildable is the process of building. For the actuality must be either this or the house. But when there is a house, the buildable is no longer there.”

¹⁹ *SKS* 4, 237 / *PF*, 74.

²⁰ There is another, more religiously significant sense in which movement is a kind of suffering. This will be discussed shortly.

²¹ While Aristotle does not employ the term immanence, motion, for him, is strictly defined as an actualization or fulfillment of what is potential *qua* potential. Thus, to take the activity of house building, again, the motion of building is the fulfillment of what is buildable *qua* buildable. Brick, mortar, stone, and their constituent parts have the capacity to become a house. The fulfilling of that capacity, and the subsequent annihilation of other competing capacities, is motion. See *Physics* III.1, 201a10-17 and III.2, 202a5-11. In addition, Aristotle argues that the human cause of motion—the builder—must be *capable* of building (*Physics* III.3, 202a13-18).

spouse, then her choosing, repeating, and living-out are actions she is capable of doing. This immanent characteristic of possibility is especially emphasized in the aesthetic writings of 1843—*Either/Or* I and II, *Fear and Trembling*, and *Repetition*. In *Either/Or* II, Judge William encourages his aesthetic friend, *A*, to actualize his inherent capacity for becoming a dutiful self through the maturation and cultivation of his personality.²² Furthermore, Johannes de Silentio envisions the knight of infinite resignation as a hero who struggles to realize his capacity for giving up everything finite. The movement of resignation, for de Silentio, is an act he and every other human agent can do. “I *can* make the mighty trampoline leap whereby I cross over into infinity; my back is like a tightrope dancer’s, twisted in my childhood, and therefore it is easy for me.”²³

III. Movement and Religious Existence

The themes of suffering and immanence as they pertain to the transition from possibility to actuality are similarly treated in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. The penultimate chapter of *Postscript*, “The Issue in *Fragments*: How Can an Eternal Happiness Be Built on Historical Knowledge,” describes the kinetic movement involved in becoming a self. The initial stages of inwardness (to ethical and ethical-religious existence) are conceived in *immanent* terms, and Climacus argues that becoming a self consists in the fulfillment of human possibility. However, he stresses that the highest intensification of inwardness comes with the awareness that the possibility for becoming a self is *given* by God. Climacus calls this the movement from “religiousness A” to “religiousness B”—from the “immanently religious” to the “paradoxical-

²² SKS 2, 146 / *EO II*, 160.

²³ SKS 3, 87 / *FT*, 36.

religious,” or Christian existence.²⁴ With the topic of change in mind, what distinguishes religiousness B from religiousness A is that the latter conceives of the possibility for self-transformation before God as inherent in and essential to humanity as such. The former, on the other hand, conceives of the possibility of self-transformation as given by God. In this way, Climacus urges a shift from conceiving of movement in terms of *kinēsis* (with its two-pronged characteristic of suffering and immanence) to a non-kinetic model of change whereby the possibility for transformation is both preserved in and transcendent to the individual. Thus, for Climacus, coming into Christian existence, which invariably involves a movement of faith, is not modeled on Aristotelian change.

Religiousness A, in addition to the ethical sphere of existence glossed by Judge William and de Silentio, understands transformation in terms of *self-motion*. Self-motion consists in the assertion of the self in actualizing an inherent possibility. That is, for the ethical sphere and religiousness A, becoming oneself is an actualization of what one already, in some implicit sense, is or can be.²⁵

While the change of coming into existence is viewed as an immanent possibility in the ethical sphere and religiousness A, it is worth noting some important differences between how the change is initiated. Climacus describes the difference between the ethical and immanent religious movements of inwardness as follows:

If the individual is dialectically turned inward in self-assertion in such a way that the ultimate foundation does not in itself become dialectical, since the underlying self is used to surmount and assert itself, then we have the *ethical*... If the individual is defined as

²⁴ Cf. *SKS* 7, 484-511 / *CUPI*, 555-586.

²⁵ This has, considering the Aristotelian influence on Kierkegaard's concept of motion, a Greek analog: the coming into existence of the world as *ex materia*. The form and shape of the world resides potentially in pre-existent matter. *Kinēsis*, as a change of coming into existence, is the making actual of what is essentially possible for the kind of material it is. For example, Aristotle argues that human flesh and bone is composed of smaller mixtures of stuff, which is, by nature, potentially human flesh and bone. Matter, then, that is not suited to become formed as an individual human being is not potentially human, but potentially something else.

dialectically turned inward in self-annihilation before God, then we have *Religiousness A*.²⁶

The primary feature of qualitative transition with regard to the ethical sphere is that it is *self-motion* into inwardness. The apex of the ethical consists in arriving at the realization that to be responsible and dutiful requires arriving at a conception of oneself as an agent who is able to make the choice to be oneself. The possibility to be oneself is *native* to the agent. Thus, *A*, the aesthete of *Either/Or I*, just needs to change his illegitimate self-conception to realize this and actualize this possibility.

In immanent religiousness, on the other hand, the movement the religious individual makes is *self-annihilation* before God, which Climacus explains is a prerequisite for Christian union with the divine.²⁷ Climacus parses the movement of self-annihilation along the lines of three intersecting existential moments—resignation, suffering, and guilt. In the first, there is an *understanding* by the agent that in order to achieve eternal happiness as the highest good, all relative goods must be subordinated to it, and that this, in actuality, requires suffering resignation of finite goals.²⁸ The second moment obtains when the agent *actually* carries out resignation; that is, when resignation is no longer merely a possibility for but is actualized by the individual.²⁹ In the third moment, the suffering agent hits upon the realization that her actualization of the possibility of resignation cannot be adequately achieved moment to moment. The religious individual, then, becomes conscious of the guilt of falling short of the task of relatively relating to relative ends and relating absolutely to the absolute.³⁰

²⁶ *SKS 7*, 498 / *CUPI*, 572.

²⁷ *SKS 7*, 486 / *CUPI*, 556: Climacus writes, “Religiousness A must first be present in the individual before than can be any consideration of becoming aware of the dialectical B.”

²⁸ *SKS 7*, 335-336 / *CUPI*, 387

²⁹ *SKS 7*, 374-375 / *CUPI*, 431-432.

³⁰ *SKS 7*, 458-459 / *CUPI*, 525-527.

IV. Immanent and Transcendent Possibility

Guilt, the third moment of immanent religiousness, is a necessary step on the way to Christian existence, due in large part to an awareness of the rift that separates what persons are inherently capable of achieving in their moral striving and what they are not. Awareness of this gap results in a crisis, which can only be resolved through faith that *outside assistance* along the way to eternal happiness is possible. In this case, the individual is aware of her inability to bring about a proper relationship between her finite and temporal existence and the eternal; in contrast, the Christian is aware that the possibility for achieving eternal happiness does not rest immanently in the human essence, but in being given by God.

The difference between the movements that religiousness A (the immanently religious) and religiousness B (Christian existence) make is rendered concrete through a juxtaposition of Socratic recollection and Christian faith, particularly with regard to how each understands the relationship between time and eternity, the finite and the absolute. In Climacus' *Philosophical Fragments* the recurring theme is how eternal happiness can be acquired without downplaying the importance of our concrete, temporal, and finite existence. For Climacus, if the moment in time is going to have any significance, then we must move beyond Socratic recollection. As Climacus states,

Viewed Socratically, any point of departure in time is *eo ipso* something accidental, a vanishing point, an occasion...If the situation is to be different, then the moment in time must have decisive significance that for no moment will I be able to forget it, neither in time nor in eternity, because the eternal, previously nonexistence, came into existence in that moment.³¹

From the Socratic point of view, every human being *qua* human being holds the essential possibility for the attainment of eternal bliss. In other words, the truth about what sustains and

³¹ SKS 4, 181-183 / PF, 11-13.

completes human existence is immanent to humanity as such.³² The individual in religiousness A begins with this assumption, but finds herself guilty for falling short of the standards necessary to live the good life. Awakening to the emptiness of this capacity for realizing the essential possibility for the good, the individual, as Anti-Climacus explains, despairs over this weakness.³³

Philosophical Fragments, without naming it as such, argues that Christianity is the answer to the Socratic dilemma. Rather than viewing the possibility for the realization of eternal happiness within the sphere of immanence, Christianity understands that the individual lacks this possibility. If the individual lacks the immanent possibility for achieving the good, then the individual *essentially* lacks this capacity. Here, then, the individual is “untruth.”³⁴ Through a free act of losing the condition for attaining eternal happiness, the individual has fallen from original union with God, and is now greatly divorced from the absolute. Climacus calls this great divorce sin.³⁵ Because the religious individual cannot naturally come to know that the reason it is impossible to completely relate to an eternal happiness on one’s own is due to one’s own moral failing means that the capacity for such consciousness needs to be specially revealed by God in time.³⁶

As *Philosophical Fragments* presents the issue, the god in time comes down as a teacher³⁷ and redeemer³⁸ to provide the condition for relating to eternity and ultimately for becoming a whole and properly related self. Kierkegaard’s Climacus emphasizes that in Christian religiousness there is a possibility for the self’s union with God, but the possibility is

³² SKS 4, 180, 181, 183 / PF, 9, 11, 13.

³³ SKS 11, 173 / SUD, 61.

³⁴ SKS 4, 183 / PF, 13

³⁵ SKS 4, 185 / PF, 15; SKS 7, 508-510 / CUP1, 583-585.

³⁶ SKS 7, 509 / CUP1, 584.

³⁷ SKS 4, 184 / PF, 14.

³⁸ SKS 4, 187 / PF, 17.

granted to the individual, not in virtue of what rests as an immanent possibility, but in virtue of the “absurd”: the eternal coming into existence in time.³⁹ Climacus writes that

The paradoxical-religious breaks with immanence and makes existing the absolute contradiction—not within immanence but in opposition to immanence. There is no immanent underlying kinship between the temporal and the eternal, because the eternal itself has entered into time and wants to establish kinship there.⁴⁰

For Climacus, the paradoxical-religious rests on the coming into existence of the eternal in time, which is against the very nature of the eternal to do. Yet, the actualization of the self cannot be complete without this paradox, because it accentuates individual existence by granting the possibility for transformation or conversion from the willed state of untruth.⁴¹

V. The Variety of Movement: A Recap

The foregoing outline of the paradoxical-religious has taken us quite far from the kinetic model that governs the aesthetic, ethical, and the immanently religious spheres of existence. Aesthetic change consists of an external, generic transition from possibility to actuality. Likewise, the ethical and the stage of religiousness A are modeled on a transition from possibility to actuality. As spheres of immanence, the ethical and religiousness A hold that the possibility for attaining the good lies essentially within the nature of humanity. The self-assertive motion of the ethical brings about the actualization of this possibility by fashioning the good merely in terms of choice. Recall that for Judge William the good is conceived and contained within the reality of choosing oneself. Religiousness A understands its absolute end to be eternal happiness, or union with God. The rift between one’s finitude and the absolute Good is widened to such a degree that the actualization of the individual’s essential possibility for relating to this good is jettisoned. In

³⁹ SKS 7, 175-176 / CUP1, 208-210.

⁴⁰ SKS 7, 499 / CUP1, 573.

⁴¹ SKS 4, 188 / PF, 18-19.

self-annihilation, the agent in religiousness A despairs over her finitude because individually existing human beings are unable to achieve the good alone. In this way, the individual has failed to properly relate with God, thus resulting in a failed movement.

For religiousness B, in contrast, the change of coming into existence of the self is not modeled on *kinēsis*. The possibility of arriving into the paradoxically-religious is not immanent, but transcendent to the individual and, when it is given, it will need to be *preserved* in the transformation of the agent into a new and redeemed self before God.⁴² Possibility is preserved in the transformation of the self, because without it the self would be lost in a multiplicity of moments over time. In other words, *continuity* of the self at each moment would not obtain.

See also: Being/Becoming; Cause/Effect; Choice; Contingency/Necessity/Possibility; Double Movement; Existence/Existential; Immanence/Transcendence; Mediation/Sublation; Redoubling/Reduplication; Self; Time/Temporality/Eternity; Transition.

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⁴² SKS 4, 188 / PF, 19.