

Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, Williams, and the Internal Point of View

“Why should we care about ethics? Can reason alone persuade us to be moral? This problem haunts philosophy today just as it did at the outset. In *Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, Williams, and the Internal Point of View*, Rob Compaijen shows Kierkegaard to be a vital, illuminating interlocutor for philosophers grappling with these questions. Lucid, engaging, and deftly argued, this book’s conclusions—provocative, original, and challenging—will be of deep and enduring interest to moral philosophers and Kierkegaard scholars alike.”

—Patrick Stokes, *senior lecturer in philosophy, Deakin University, Australia, author of *The Naked Self* (2015) and *Kierkegaard’s Mirrors* (2010).*

“Compaijen’s lucid and engaging work connects Kierkegaard in interesting ways to recent philosophical debates about reasons for action and moral motivation. I found his work very thought-provoking, even, or especially, where I disagreed with him. I recommended this for anyone interested in Kierkegaard or contemporary moral psychology and action theory.”

—Anthony Rudd, *Associate Professor of Philosophy, St. Olaf College, USA, author of *Self, Value and Narrative: a Kierkegaardian Approach* (2012).*

“Can we ascribe reasons to embrace ethical—or Christian—life to those living ‘outside’? Arguing for the importance of recognising our internal motivations in the picture with which these worldviews confront us, Rob Compaijen’s clearly written and thought-provoking study shows a mastery of two very different bodies of philosophical literature in advancing an important ongoing debate. The book will interest anyone open to considering Kierkegaard’s relevance to contemporary moral philosophy.”

—John Lippitt, *Professor of Ethics and Philosophy of Religion, University of Hertfordshire, UK, and Honorary Professor of Philosophy, Deakin University, Australia, author of *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love* (2013), *Routledge Guidebook to Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling* (2003) and *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard’s Thought* (2000).*

“Rob Compaijen displays a masterful command of the texts in play. His sensitivity to nuance and the charity with which he engages opposing points of view are exceptional. This is exactly the kind of book we need more of in Kierkegaard studies; it is honest, insightful, and engaging.”

—Antony Aumann, *Associate Professor of Philosophy,*
Northern Michigan College, USA

Rob Compaijen

**Kierkegaard,
MacIntyre, Williams,
and the Internal
Point of View**

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To Anne and Marjolein

Preface and Acknowledgements

This book, which has grown out of my doctoral dissertation, is the result of a continuing fascination with Kierkegaard's insightful (though often very difficult) thought and a growing interest in contemporary moral philosophy. Over the years I have become convinced both of the value of a Kierkegaardian approach to fundamental issues in philosophical ethics, and of the importance of reading Kierkegaard from the point of view of contemporary moral philosophy. I hope this book demonstrates just how fruitful that confrontation can be.

Many people have contributed to the development of my ideas in this book. I would like to thank Johan Taels. My thoughts and this book have greatly benefitted from his knowledge of Kierkegaard as well as from his warm personality and the wonderful conversations that flowed from it. He has always taken the time to carefully read and comment on my writings, and has been very encouraging, even when we disagreed in our interpretations of Kierkegaard. I would also like to thank Paul van Tongeren for his readiness to read and discuss this book. When I was a student in Nijmegen, he told me that he liked my approach to philosophy but that it was not critical enough. If this book is a testimony of my improvement in this regard it is mainly because of everything I have learned from him. I am grateful to Katrien Schaubroeck for her comments on Chap. 3. Her expertise on the debate about practical reasons has proved helpful in developing my thoughts about the subject. I would

also like to thank Marianne Brommer, Gerbert Floor, Jochem Jansen, Aad Reinds, and Djim van Zalk for their willingness to read and discuss several parts of this book. Their comments have improved the clarity of my argument.

Over the last couple of years I have had several opportunities to visit and work at the *Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscenteret* in Copenhagen. I would like to thank Bjarne Still Laurberg for his unparalleled helpfulness, Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Pia Søltøft, and Joakim Garff for their hospitality as well as for the interesting conversations, and Patrick Stokes for supervising me there and his continuing interest in my work.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to my parents. They trusted me when I made the rather unusual decision to study philosophy and have continued to support me through the years. I appreciate their warm interest in me and my philosophical work. Most of all I want to thank my wife, Anne, without whom I could not have written this book. Her readiness to read and correct parts of the book, her willingness to listen to my thoughts when I was confused, her encouragements when my spirits were low, and her wisdom and love have made all the difference. Finally, I am so grateful for our wonderful daughter, Marjolein, who continues to amaze me and reminds me of how much more there is to life.

Chapter 5 (Sect. 1) draws upon material that has been published in Dutch: Rob Compaijen, “Zwaarmoedigheid en verlangen. Kierkegaard over de esthetische levensvisie en de vraag waarom de mens die achter zich zou moeten laten”, in: *Wat bezielt Kierkegaard? Zeven essays over een dwarse denker*, ed. by R. van Riessen and O. Zijlstra, Budel: Damon, 2014, pp. 31–53. I would like to thank the publishers, Jenny and John, for their kind permission to translate and use this material.

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List of Abbreviations¹

- CA *Concept of Anxiety*, ed. and transl. by R. Thomte and A.B. Anderson, Kierkegaard's writings, vol. 8, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- CUP *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Volume 1, ed. and transl. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 12, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- EO1 *Either/Or. Part I*, ed. and transl. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 3, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- EO2 *Either/Or. Part II*, ed. and transl. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 4, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- FT *Fear and Trembling & Repetition*, ed. and transl. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 6, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- JP *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vols. 1–7, ed. and transl. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967–1978.
- PC *Practice in Christianity*, ed. and transl. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 20, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

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- PF *Philosophical Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy* /Johannes Climacus, or *De omnibus dubitandum est*, ed. and transl. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 7, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- PV *The Point of View*, ed. and transl. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 22, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- SKS *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vols. 1–28, ed. by N.J. Cappelørn et al., Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997–2013.
- SLW *Stages on Life's Way*, ed. and transl. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 11, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- SUD *The Sickness Unto Death*, ed. and transl. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 19, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- UDVS *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, ed. transl. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 15, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- WL *Works of Love*, ed. and transl. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, vol. 16, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Notes

1. In quoting from Kierkegaard's works, I refer both to the Danish *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (SKS) and the English translations from the Kierkegaard's Writings series. When citing the SKS, I refer to the volume and page number (for example SKS 12, 234). When citing the English translations, I refer to the abbreviated title and page number (for example CA, 18). When citing the English translations of Kierkegaard's journals and papers, I refer to the volume and page number (for example JP1, 89).