The Concept of Despair in Søren Kierkegaard

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Abstract

This essay proposes the investigation of the concept of Despair within the works of Søren Kierkegaard.

As a background to the subject, the Kierkegaardian concepts of Self, Mood and Dread are treated. The Self is studied in regard to its constitution and to the way the misrelationship of its inner elements affects it. As Despair appears as one of the Moods, these are examined in their functions and dynamics. The concept of Dread is clarified, as Dread and Despair are closely related symptoms of the misrelationship within the Self and therefore the necessity of distinction imposes itself.

The second chapter is limited to the discussion of Despair proper and its immediate effects within the individual.

The next chapter completes this discussion, as Despair is traced through Kierkegaard's aesthetic, ethical and religious stages, and seen as a possible leading factor in the individual's progress that culminates in the faith relationship of man to God.

In the first Appendix, the concept of Repetition is examined, viewed as the outcome of the faith relationship. By contributing in bringing about this faith relationship, Despair actually is involved in the reattainment of that state of innocence which was man's in the beginning.

The second Appendix discusses Despair in relationship to the abyss, making it clear that they are not synonymous but rather that Despair might be the mood of the individual confronted by the abyss.

Richard Loranger

Le concept de Desespoir chez Soren Kierkegaard

Resumé

Cet essai se propose l'investigation du concept de Désespoir tel qu'il apparaît dans l'oeuvre de Kierkegaard.

Les concepts Kierkegaardiens de Moi, Humeur et Angoisse sont traités en tant qu'arrière-plan du sujet principal. Le Moi est étudié en rapport de sa structure et sous l'aspect de l'effet que le conflit existant entre ses divers componentes intérieures a sur lui. Le Désespoir étant une des Humeurs, celles-ci sont examinées quant à leurs fonctions et leur dynamique. Le concept de l'Angoisse est clarifié, une distinction étant nécessaire du fait que l'Angoisse et le Désespoir s'avèrent comme des symptômes qui'se ressemblent d'un même conflit, celui existant à l'interieur du Moi.

Le second chapitre est dédié à la discussion du Désespoir proprement-dit et aux effets qu'il a sur l'individu.

Le prochain chapitre complète cette présentation en suivant le Désespoir à travers les étapes esthetiques, éthiques et religieuses, établies par Kierkegaard, de même qu'en le plaçant dans son rôle possible d'élément principal pour la démarche de l'individu vers Dieu, celle-ci aboutissant à l'établissement de la relation de foi.

Un premier Appendice traite le concept de la Répétition vue comme le résultat de cette relation de foi. En étant responsable de l'avénement de la dernière, le Désespoir est, en fait, directement impliqué dans la ré-atteinte de l'état d'innocence originellement propre à l'individu.

Le deuxième Appendice met le Désespoir en rapport avec le néant et, en contredisant leur synonimité, affirme la qualité du Désespoir d'être l'Humeur de l'individu confronté au néant.

Richard Loranger

The successful completion of this work was brought about with the help of a number of people, to whom I owe a great deal.

I would, therefore, like to offer my deepest gratitude to Dr. Peter Carpenter, my thesis advisor, who would not allow me the comfort of intellectual complacency but encouraged me towards clarification and precision in my work; to Dr. Joseph McLelland who not only inspired me to go into Philosophy of Religion but also helped me to find a job and extra funds to support myself while at McGill; to Miss Norma Johnston and Mrs. Jennifer Wheeler who were invaluable in helping me track down sources and in creating a positive atmosphere in which to work; to Darlene Fowler for her help in retyping parts of my thesis and finally to the whole faculty which in the true meaning of the phrase alma mater nurtured my intellectual life for five years.

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INTRODUCTION

One wonders why a study of Kierkegaard is necessary and even valuable today. Alastair McKinnon states in a C.B.C. radio talk show back in 1961 that Kierkegaard is.

> "... today dismissed by most of his countrymen as a relic of the presecular past. His small recent vogue in the United States is limited almost entirely to those concerned primarily with religious belief ..." (1)

But McKinnon does go on to answer this question and his answer seems even more pertinent twenty years later. Kierkegaard is important today because he lives

> "through our age ... He understands the peculiar plight and character of man in the twentieth century." (2)

Kierkegaard was born on May 5, 1813, the last of seven children, to a prosperous merchant family. Theirs was a home considered to be one of the chief intellectual centres of the community where the prevalent philosophy of the day, Hegelianism was debated.(3) He died forty-two years later in 1855 after living, what to many must have seemed, a quite ordinary life. But this elusive genius left to following generations a wealth

1) Alastair McKinnon, Søren Kierkegaard: Architects of Modern Thought: 12 Talks for C.B.C. Radio. (Toronto: Hunter Rose Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 1

2) Ibid, p. 1. Robert Perkins in his article "Always Himself: A Survey of Recent Kierkegaard Literature." The Southern Journal of Philosphy, 12 (1974), 64., puts this even more succinctly, comparing Kierkegaard to a prophet serving his times and so, through his influence on many modern writers, serving our times as well.

3) Ibid, p. 21

of philosophical and theological literature of such profound insight and subtlety that scholars will be hard pressed to fully understand him.

An even more interesting legacy is the enigma of the man himself. He was considered dissolute by those surrounding him and yet today he is considered by many an ardent Christian in the mold of Tertullian and Bernard of Clairvaux. His faith was

> "... the straight, perilous and insecure gate to salvation. This 'belief-style' characterized by severe self-scrutiny, either/or commitments, spiritual egalitarianism, and an antisystematic (and consequently, more or less anti-institutional) understanding of the relationship of thought (and formal religious practice to (religious) life) provided Kierkegaard not only with the perspective to read Augustine and Luther but also to use them to question, despite his admiration, the classical philosophers and even to attack the theologically influential, philosophical presence of his own time, Hegel." (1)

He has bequeathed to us a system of belief needing no empirical proofs (or philosophical), one which postulates meaning in what appears to be a seemingly meaningless existence. Meaning emerges from within each of us, and our existence is meaningful if lived by reflectively contemplating our life and its place in the world it experiences.

1) Marin A. Bertman, "Kierkegaard: A Sole Possibility For Individual Unity," Philosophy Today, 16 (1972), 306-7

> "Only after bumping into being with his life can man read off an authentic result in thought." (1)

This focussing on man, this reflection upon existential experience, may be one reason why Kierkegaard's work cannot be 'neatly summarized'. For his purpose was not to build another system to rival Hegel's but to bring the individual to an awareness of himself in his life before God. He had no 'world vision' to communicate or 'ultimate truth' to propound, he wished to bring the individual

> "to stand alone before God, stripped of all evasion, pretence and sham ..." (2)

This is Kierkegaard's relevance for man today: that as the age becomes more and more desperate and more and more in need of salvation and hope, Kierkegaard's voice becomes louder and echoes through the voices of the 'prophets' of this age. Kierkegaard wrote of himself:

> "Life has not yet become confused enough to compel people to seek me. But they will eventually discover that, however it all ends, conditions will become so desperate that 'desperate' people like me and my colleagues will be sought to render help." (3)

1) Carl Michalson, "Existentialism is a Mysticism," Theology Today, 12 (1955), 359-60. Although it must be admitted that there is some validity in the comparison between existentialism and mysticism in this article it must be pointed out that even a cursory reading of mystical works (e.g. The Cloud of Unknowing, edt. by W. Johnston. New York: Image Books, 1973.) shows that when it comes to the concept of self there is a definite difference. In mysticism the self diluted and eradicated tends to be in a (Cloud of Unknowing, p. 94), whereas in existentialism there is a definite emphasis placed on the development of self consciousness.

2) Alastair McKinnon, Søren Kierkegaard, p. 2

3) Gregor Malantschuk, "Kierkegaard and Totalitarianism," The American-Scandinavian Review, 34 (1946), 246.

This age has indeed become ripe to listen to Kierkegaard, though his own age, perhaps, was not. His explanation for this was that the decay of the age had gone further in him than in anyone else. (1) Therefore a study of Kierkegaard is a study of our own age; a study of an age

> "deceived by the joys of life or by its sorrows"; (2)

an age that has declared that God is dead; an age, to use Kierkegaard's own words, which

> "... is more melancholy, and hence more profoundly in despair." (3)

In this thesis Kierkegaard's concept of despair will be examined. There is no room here for the various psychological theories that depict his concept of despair as welling up from within him due to various psychological disfunctions, for although they would not detract from the validity of an existential analysis they would be irrelevant to my thesis. It must be admitted that this psychological approach has been influential (4) but the works are copious in this field and do not bear directly on my study of the subject. Where sources have been chosen that appear to be influenced by this approach care has been taken not to allow it to divert attention from the main thrust of the thesis.

1) Alastair McKinnon, Søren Kierkegaard, p. 6

2) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, trans. W. Lowrie, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 160

3) S. Kierkegaard, Either/Or: A Fragment of Life, v. 1, trans. David Swenson and Lillian Swenson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 115

4) Ib Ostenfeld, Søren Kierkegaard's Psychology, Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1972), p. xi

There is, however, an important question that must be taken into consideration and that concerns Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works. There are two extreme positions which may be considered: one is to take everything written by Kierkegaard as his own or to consider nothing his which does not have his name affixed to it.

The supposed reason for the first view is the facility and manageability of Kierkegaard's works. The second has to do with the Kierkegaardian method of indirect communication whereby he leaves it to the individual to discover the truth for himself. If we erase the pseudonyms we transform these works into direct statements.

There is, however, a synthesis of these two views which is expounded by Johansen in his essay Kierkegaard on the Tragic:

> "It is well known that Kierkegaard - at least toward the end of the authorship - claimed that in the pseudonymous works the duplicity between an aesthetic and a religious trend should be regarded as a unity, i.e. the authorship should be considered a preconceived whole ... In my opinion it is possible to distinguish between the different conceptual structures in Kierkegaard in such a way that, when taken together, these structures constitute the unity, whereas they remain autonomous when taken apart." (1)

For the purpose of this thesis it will be assumed that Kierkegaard's pseudon mous works are a conceptual unity, so that when Kierkegaard is writing, whether directly or indirectly, he is attempting to say the same thing.

1) Karsten Frus Johansen, "Kierkegaard on the Tragic", Danish Yearbook of Philosophy, 13 (1976), 134-35. This assumption is also held by Bradley R. Dewey, "Kierkegaard on Suffering: Promise and Lack of Fulfillment in Life's Stages", Humanitas, 9 (1973).

This not only simplifies the task ahead but also allows for clarity and conciseness, in that little preliminary work will be required before a point can be made or the thesis developed. We are free to concentrate on what is being said without wading through the exegetical difficulties.

Before we can deal directly with the problem of despair it will prove necessary to discuss the concepts of self, mood and dread (or anxiety). These notions need clarification if we are to understand what Kierkegaard means by despair. Despair is a misrelationship in the self. But how is the self constituted that this may happen? Despair is one of the moods. But what are the moods for Kierkegaard and how do they function in the dynamics of the self? Despair and dread are closely related symptoms in the misrelationship of the self and yet at the same time different? How precisely? These concepts must be investigated before we may begin to investigate the concept of despair. Yet at the same time it must be acknowledged that these investigations will be far from exhaustive; they are merely intended to help us understand Kierkegaard's concept of despair while avoiding unnecessary confusion.

This thesis will begin with the investigation of the self which stands at the centre of Kierkegaard's philosophy: all things happen in and of the self in its relation to God, to the world and to itself. Then the moods will be examined, the matrix out of which despair emanates. Then finally it will be shown how dread functions not only as the birthplace of despair but also as it mingles with despair in the life of the self. Finally the concept of despair will be examined showing how despair is both the blessing and the curse of the self.

CHAPTER I - THE SELF & THE MOODS

SECTION I - THE SELF

INTRODUCTION

Kierkegaard's concept of man differs from the classical one in two respects. (1) He firstly rejects the idea of man as being a purely rational creature. That is not to say that Kierkegaard views man as irrational but, rather, he views man as a synthesis of reason, imagination and feeling. Secondly, man is not merely a spectator of time but one who lives within time. This means that man must use time to create meaning for his own life through his actions and decisions.

Through decisions in which one chooses the self absolutely the self evolves and develops. But there is an obstacle to this evolution and that is the society about him which can pull the self away from its quest, which is the self grounded in God, and cause it to drown in the cultural mass. For

> "... this consciousness of being an individual is the primary consciousness in a man, which is his eternal consciousness." (2)

Kierkegaard uses the term self in a restricted way: the self is that which relates itself to itself and to God.

1) Alastair McKinnon, Søren Kierkegaard, p. 6-7

2) Gregor Malantschuk, Kierkegaard's Thought, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 323-4

Mark C. Taylor uses the term "self system" to designate the total structure of the personality. (1) Kierkegaard uses a number of ways to express the synthesis called man and each has its third synthesizing factor: body/soul (spirit), temporal/eternal (instant), finite/infinite (self), necessity/possibility (freedom). This shall be discussed more in depth later on.

THE SYNTHESIS OF THE SELF

The self, for Kierkegaard, is that three-tiered structure of body, soul and spirit. The body is seen as an 'historical and sociophysical identity,' it is the self's

"... inescapable necessity." (2)

The body is not a composite of mathematical data such as Descartes' res extensa (3) but the constantly changing necessity of the self.

The soul is the animating force and the source of all possibility. It is the soul (imagination) which projects the possibilities before the self and it remains free of the self's necessity.

The spirit is not seen as the Hegelian synthesis but as the third factor in the relation:

1) Mark C. Taylor, "Kierkegaard on the Structure of Selfhood," Kierkegaardiana, 9 (1974), 85

2) John W. Elrod, "Feuerbach and Kierkegaard on the Self," Journal of Religion, 56 (1976), 356-7. He goes on to say that the Heideggerian term 'facticity' conveys the same meaning.

3) Ibid, p. 356-7

> "... spirit is the activity of reflectively differentiating the elements of the synthesis in the consciousness and reestablishing them as a unity in existence." (1)

According to Mark C. Taylor, Kierkegaard admits of two parts in the 'self system'. (2) The first is the spirit or the self, the second are the various elements in the synthesis. What Taylor seems to do is to remove the temporal from the temporal/eternal synthesis equating it with body and soul, finite and infinite, necessity and possibility. The eternal, then becomes equivalent to spirit, self and freedom.

As a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal the individual is a synthesis of being and becoming (or unchangeability and changeability). Furthermore, since

> "... the eternal element in the self-system is self identical, it provides the factor of continuity without which the self-system would be immersed in ceaseless flux." (3)

The temporality of the self means that the self is always open to change in existence; that which does not change is the freedom to act in each new situation. The capacity for choice of action is the constant factor in the self-system. It would seem to be in this sense that Kierkegaard may say that the self is both temporal and eternal: temporal in the sense that he is bound by his actual self in time and space, yet eternal in that he is always capable of choice (open to possibility).

1) Ibid, p. 356-7

2) Mark C. Taylor, Kierkegaard on the Structure of Selfhood, p. 85-6

3) Ibid, p. 88

Kierkegaard's conception of the relationship of both possibility and necessity is in a manner like Hegel's. It is

> "... the result of the exercise of the will. That is to say it is the result of activity which he calls the self." (1)

For as we shall see later Kierkegaard equates the will with the self and it is the will which actualizes all possibilities. This Kierkegaard calls freedom, that is to say it is through the will that the actual self has the capacity to become the ideal self; however, the individual must not choose himself as an abstraction, as some speculative or theoretical unity, but as the particular self.

Kierkegaard by the use of this complex dialectical synthesis of selfhood is attempting to

> "... overcome the tendency of past philosophy to identify the self with some higher faculty like mind or soul and make the subtle dialectical point that the self is both a unity and a process." (2)

The self is to be seen as the self-conscious existential unity which has the freedom to choose itself and make its choice not with mind or soul alone but through its whole dynamic structure.

1) Ibid, p. 99. Paul Dietrichson in "Kierkegaard's Concept of the Self," Inquiry, 8 (1965), 8, states that when Kierkegaard "considers man as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite he has in mind the Socratic-Platonic conception of the limit and the unlimited: a being, which though it has certain limits beyond which it cannot develop, can still develop in innumerable ways within these limits."

2) John W. Elrod, Feuerbach and Kierkegaard on the Self, p. 357-8

SELF AS FREEDOM

The self is freedom, or rather, the unchanging element of the self is freedom. It is the self's constant ability to relate its ideal self to its real self. (1) This does not necessitate an unchanging ability in the self to actualize possibilities but rather to choose. It is always related to the actual situation of the individual in existence.

Man is conditioned by his historical situation in the Kierkegaardian scheme. His actuality (what he has become via his past) is constituted of previous decisions, so that when a person comes to a point of choosing he must take into consideration both the possibilities available to him and also what state he is in in the present through prior choices. In other words, he must attempt to realize possibilities that are commensurate with his actuality. The activation, then, of these possibilities conditions one's actuality and also conditions future possibilities. In making decisions about the future one decides one's past.

So in this moment of choice both the temporal and the eternal are synthesized: the temporal because one is taking one's history as an individual as well as a member of the human race into account, and the eternal because, as we have seen, in the Kierkegaardian sysnthesis the eternal is identified with spirit, self and freedom. Freedom is eternal because it is

1) Perry Le Fevre, in Prayers of Kierkegaard, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 173, states from an argument of Swenson "that reality for Kierkegaard is the ethical synthesis of the ideal and the actual self within the individual."

constant and unchanging. But we must be careful not to confuse freedom of choice and free will. Freedom of choice is eternal only in so far as it is focused towards ethical and religious perfection and is preliminary to the true freedom which is the opposite of sin. This 'true' freedom is characterized by an inner necessity which posits only one possibility disregarding all the rest. The one possibility is God, the rest is sin.

CONCLUSION

Kierkegaard equates the spirit with the eternal in man and with the self. The self is both a complex set of relationships and also that element which synthesizes these relationships. The self, for Kierkegaard, is not static but a dynamic activity. (1) It is the consciousness which is decisive, as is stated in The Sickness Unto Death.

> "The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will, and the more will the more self. A man who has no will at all is no self." (2)

Kierkegaard follows these lines by describing what he feels is man's great misfortune:

> "... misfortune does not consist in the fact that such a self did not amount to anything in the world; no, the misfortune is that the man did not become aware of himself." (3)

1) Ibid, p. 172

2) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 162

3) Ibid, p. 169-70

The primary task of the self is to achieve imagined (1) goals through the exercise of free will in decision. The goal one strives toward is the equilibrium or balance of the elements in the 'self-system'. The missing of this goal is despair, whereas its accomplishment Kierkegaard calls faith.

The duty and possibility of being a self is the greatest gift God has given to mankind but at the same time it is the greatest demand eternity can place on mankind. For it was originally God who placed man in relation to Him and in so doing He set man free before Him so that he would be related not only to God but to himself. (2)

The self in existence is not yet a self for it is not yet a synthesis but is in the process of becoming. It is that towards which a life aims and until that is accomplished one is in despair. (3) A self in existence is a self in despair.

1) Mark C. Taylor, in Kierkegaard on the Structure of Selfhood, p. 97-8, says that "By means of the imagination, the individual is able to construct an ideal self which is distinguished from his real self or actual self... The two aspects of the individual's self-system are dialectically related, for the real conditions the ideal, and the ideal conditions the real."

2) Herman Diem, Kierkegaard: An Introduction, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966), p. 63

3) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 163

SECTION II - THE MOODS

INTRODUCTION

The word 'mood' in Danish is Stemning and suggests 'attunement' (1), a frame of mind influencing the psychological and emotional existence of an individual. For Kierkegaard the moods have a psychic quality and Gregor Malantschuk suggests that Kierkegaard's interest in the moods and the intensity with which he suffered from dread and despair are a transference from his father. (2) Kierkegaard himself may be alluding to this when he states that,

> "There are animals that cannot eat as long as anyone is watching them, animals that get their nourishment in the most amazing and cunning ways - so it is with my moods: what I seem to despise, I absorb secretly and unnoticed." (3)

Kierkegaard in taking the moods seriously stands between the Romantic's exaltation of them and the intellectual's disdain for them. His chief concern is to place them in a larger perspective:

> "... rescuing the significance of moods from the romantic's limited understanding, of showing how the same moods discredit the Romantic lifeview,

1) Vincent A. McCarthy, The Phenomenon of Moods in Kierkegaard, (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), p. 124. In dealing with the moods I have found that McCarthy's book was one of the few works dedicated wholly to the topic. He deals with the dynamics of the moods, from irony and anxiety to melancholy and despair, in a detailed and exhaustive manner. I have relied heavily on him for the ensuing discussion.

2) Gregor Malantschuk, Kierkegaard's Thought, p. 33

3) S. Kierkegaard, Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, v.1 (A-E). ed. & trans. by Howard & Edna Hong. (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1967), p. 369

> and then finally of indicating moods' purpose in the construction of a new, higher lifeview." (1)

The moods express the discrepancy between the man-as-he-is and the manner or quality of his life. To put this another way, they reflect the conflict between man as being and man as a dynamic, evolving process. McCarthy states:

> "... emotional disequilibrium, due to a more basic disequilibrium in the self, brings about moods or susceptibility to them." (2)

As Heidegger suggests in Being and Time it is the fact of Dasein's subjection to temporal existence which is the cause of moods. Although Kierkegaard points in that direction, McCarthy is quick to point out that it is not valid to say that Kierkegaard has an ontology of moods, (3) for that which Kierkegaard calls moods is narrower in scope than Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world'.

THE DYNAMICS OF MOODS

The various moods in the individual (dread, despair, etc.) exist simultaneously in the self until such time as the self is

1) Vincent A. McCarthy, The Phenomenon of Moods in Kierkegaard, p. 134

2) Ibid, p. 124

3) Ibid, p. 124

reintegrated through faith, although there could be said to be a point at which each mood reaches a critical stage where the self, due to some movement of spirit, experiences a widening of consciousness. This happens if one permits oneself to fully experience the mood and attempt to come to an understanding of its nature and raison d'être rather than just suffering passively beneath its onslaught until it subsides. Inherent in each mood is the potentiality for inwardness, since the mood calls our attention to the depths of our selves where we may be confronted with the cause of our misfunctions.

In the moods one becomes aware of oneself, especially as there is no discernible object to concentrate on. There is a widening of self-consciousness, of subjectivity. The more intense the mood the more intense the subjectivity. This then

> "... forces the subject to confront his own subjectivity and presses him to probe its meaning." (1)

The moods have little to do with other people, though they may act as a catalyst bringing the moods to the surface. However, the moods are in essence the problem of the self exclusively, of one's self-perception and self-understanding. The moods appear in a person's emotional life and demand an investigation of something which is happening in the self. It is the manifestation of something more profound that can only be uncovered by examining the

1) Ibid, 127

movement of the mood. There is a dialectical factor at the source of each mood: the pain of non-integration and the movement of spirit toward integration.

One could perhaps talk of a progression of mood phases, as suggested above, but this is not the case for everyone; such progression is more likely to be found in the religiously sensitive individual and even here there is never the certainty of total integration. And as long as the task of integration remains, the mood remains. Moods, however, do not endure but ebb and flow through a person's life.

> "In a strict sense they do not have structures which endure, except to the extent that they share one common enduring structure, or state: the fact that one is not (yet) the (religious) self." (1)

So long as the self is not integrated it passes from one crisis state to another. The crisis state (2) points to the transformation of the self; that is, the self is confronted by some misfunction in the self and a choice is demanded through which this misfunction may be put aright and the integration of the self enhanced. This prepares the self for another crisis state in the evolved self (brought about by the previous crisis) which further integrates the self and consequently furthers the evolution of the self towards integration. The moods may lie dormant in the psyche for a time, for they are not always active, until something happens which may cause them to surface again. And once again they have to be mastered. Here Heidegger is in complete

1) Ibid, p. 125

2) Ibid, p. 120

agreement with Kierkegaard as to the mood's purpose.

> "For Heidegger, as for Kierkegaard, mood has as its basic character to bring one back to something. This is the 'repetition' of which Kierkegaard speaks: coming back to the self grounded in relation to its Constituting Power." (1)

It is the object of the moods as part of the total structure of the self to be in accord with the self whose aim is the quest for God.

CONCLUSION

The moods indicate a movement from the childish illusions we have about ourselves to a mature comprehension of life, and this movement is shown by a progression in the self from being victimized by our moods to having mastery over them. As we have seen, beneath the movement of moods is the activity of the spirit towards integration in the unfathomable reaches of the self. It is a conflict between the self and an unintegrated way of life, an illusory life-view. The individual as spirit is dynamic and such a conception conflicts with the view of man as a static creature involved in a repetitive cycle of past moments. The result of this dynamic process is moods which chastize and punish the self into an awareness of the

1) Ibid, p. 125

inner reality, the Constituting Power, in which our self must be grounded. The moods recall the self to this Power through the painful excitation of the emotions which cannot be ignored. They plague the individual until

> "... their revelation is finally heeded and internalized." (1)

The moods are partially the reason for the richness and vividness so obvious in Kierkegaard's concepts. (2) It is through the moods that the true self, the religious self, is driven to its final rest in God.

> "There is only one proof of the truth of Christianity and that, quite rightly, is from the emotions, when the dread of sin and a heavy conscience torture a man into crossing the narrow line between despair bordering upon madness - and Christendom.
>
> There lies Christianity." (3)

1) Ibid, p. 132

2) George E. Arbaugh, George B. Arbaugh, Kierkegaard's Authorship: A Guide to the Writings of Kierkegaard, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1968), p. 161

3) S. Kierkegaard, The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, ed. & trans. by Alexander Dru, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 314

SECTION III - DREAD

INTRODUCTION

The concept of dread is dealt with by Kierkegaard in his book of the same title and is discussed in terms of man's mental and emotional life. The Arbaughs suggest that it was Kierkegaard's melancholy nature and his relationship to his father which prompted him to investigate the concept of dread. (1) They go on further to say that:

> "In order to acknowledge that sinfullness is somehow transmitted and yet is always a free act, S.K. identified the effect of original sin as dread. It is the kind of mental state out of which sin can emerge, while the actual sin remains a free deed." (2)

Dread (or as later interpreters prefer to translate it, anxiety) is an objectless anguish, an anticipation that has no substance - it is 'nothing'. (3) Man is not only repulsed

1) George E. Arbaugh, George B. Arbaugh, Kierkegaard's Authorship, p. 160

2) Ibid, p. 168

3) Vincent A. McCarthy, in The Phenomenon of Moods in Kierkegaard, p. 49, states that "what Kierkegaard seems to be trying to say is that there is 'something' functioning which causes the shudder of anxiety and which potentiates its repetition. But this something is entirely vague and contentless, such that it can be spoken of as 'nothing'." The secular existentialists understand this 'nothing' to be the potential, ideal self before it is actualized; dread they understand to be the dread of death. This, however, lacks Kierkegaard's spiritual conception of the self's realtionship with God. It is not life's pathos which Kierkegaard is referring to in dread, nor naturalistic spirituality but, rather, man's choice of God and his quest to ground himself in that Constituting Power.

by this nothing, but is also attracted by it. Again to quote the Arbaughs:

> "Man's temptation to sin is of this character, for man is not tempted simply by the world, by God, or by a 'serpent'. Every man is tempted by himself, through the fascination of his own dreams of the future and the possible." (1)

Dread is anguish over nebulous possibilities and has no object as does fear, nor will as does sin. Croxall views dread as a 'presentiment' of spiritual sickness. He goes on to say:

> "It is a presentiment and premonition. About what? About nothing; nothing, that is, that lies outside ourselves; nothing that is as yet potentiated within ourselves either." (2)

This nothing is no abstraction in Croxall's opinion but a 'psychological state' which points to an inner disease. But dread has a positive aspect to it as well; that is, it is a reminder of man's eternal origin, (3) a time when man's spirit was with God in a state of dreaming innocence. And yet it is this innocence which is dread. For the spirit existed projecting its reality outside itself and upon beholding its reality, which was innocence, (and innocence is nothing), and thus beholding nothing outside of itself it was filled with dread.

1) George E. Arbaugh, George B. Arbaugh, Kierkegaard's Authorship, p. 161

2) T. H. Croxall, "Discussion: Man's Inner Condition. A Study in Kierkegaard", Philosophy, 16 (1941), p. 253

3) Herman Diem, in Kierkegaard an Introduction, p. 52 states that Heidegger, among the many twentieth century existential philosophers, treats The Concept of Dread as an exceptional piece of work for in it Kierkegaard underlines the 'structures of existence'.

FREEDOM AND DIZZINESS

Kierkegaard in interpreting the Fall of Man develops, according to Josiah Thompson, a

> "... framework of gradations of consciousness ..." (and thus the fall becomes) "a psychological event endlessly repeated in the lives of the individuals." (1)

Dread has its origin in spirit confronting its possibilities in freedom, that is to say in perceiving what it is capable of doing for at this point all things are possible. Between dread and sin there is a leap unexplainable by psychology, though the former state (dread) is capable of such explanation.

Although man is a synthesis the synthesis is dormant while the spirit is in a 'dreaming state'. When spirit awakens the synthesis is activated toward becoming an interacting whole. The self at this point is not self conscious; it is aware of itself as a spatial/temporal being, but is not aware of itself as a relationship of opposites. While in this state of undifferentiated unity it abides in a state of ignorance (innocence). The self views itself either as necessity unbounded by possibility or possibility unbounded by necessity but not, in this state of dreaming innocence, as a synthesis of both.

1) Josiah Thompson, The Lonely Labyrinth: Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Works, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 155

Primal dread is the dizzying state of freedom prior to sin through which the self finds itself a sinner. Realizing his freedom and desire to sin he is anxious when the conflicting desires clash. While in this undecided state the self is in the dizzying state of dread. But as McCarthy suggests:

> "It is the anxiety experience which arises in ignorance and confronts the individual with the set of possibilities of either continuing in innocence and ignorance or else sinning." (1)

Dizziness is freedom allured by, yet at the same time repulsed by, a possibility which in effect is not known for it has not been willed into existence. As Croxall states:

> "At bottom it is the nothingness of mere possibility that causes dread." (2)

Dread either before or after sin (not in the temporal but in the spiritual sense of before and after) is a dizziness of freedom. Dizziness seems to imply the knowledge of choice (the possibilities) which is implicit in dread. For if there were no knowledge of the possibilities then the spirit would go on as actuality from moment to moment which necessitates no decision and hence no dizziness. The individual attempts to move toward finiteness through choice (perhaps in an attempt to avoid the insecurity in dread through making a decision between two possibilities and thus actualizing one) and thus becomes trapped by necessity in that each decision necessitates an activation either physically or mentally in a certain direction which may nullify other possibilities.

1) Vincent A. McCarthy, The Phenomenon of Moods in Kierkegaard, p. 40

2) T. H. Croxall, Discussion: Man's Inner Condition, p. 255

Because freedom has the capability of turning possibilities into necessity this involves the self in the solidity of space and time causing a transformation in man toward limitation and death. The result of this plunge into subjectivity is that freedom succumbs to finiteness and is changed into guilt. Guilt is the opposite of freedom and the one thing that can take away freedom. The only way to regain freedom after the incursion of guilt is through repentance. To quote D. M. Emmet, Kierkegaard seems

> "... to have performed a movement analagous to the Augustinian movement from the libertas minor to the libertas major." (1)

First man has the freedom to choose between good and evil then he may choose the greater freedom which is God.

OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE DREAD

There are two relations of the self to dread: one is objective dread or the predisposition of the self to original sin, the other is subjective dread which is the effect of original sin on the self. As the Arbaughs state in regard to subjective dread,

> "... it is reminiscent of the Neoplatonic notions

1) D. M. Emmet, "Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy," Philosophy 16 (1941), p. 264

> of spirit gazing down into the mirror of dead matter, becoming enamoured of its own image and thereby falling." (1)

Dread is qualitatively the same before and after sin but because of man's altered position after sin the possibilities of the individual have changed and hence the role of dread. Although every individual makes the same choice as did Adam, by the time the individual becomes aware of this he is already held by sin and so the only conscious choice left the individual is to remain in sin or not. This possibility involves further dread, a dread one must pass through to come again to wholeness before God.

Here the individual is faced with the possibilities of the spirit which are infinite and unknowable. They both fascinate and scare the individual: 'fascinate' in that they exicte and interest one's whole self, but 'scare' in that they entail a perilous journey with many unfathomable elements. Thus we have the basic elements of dread: sympathy and antipathy.

SEXUALITY

As suggested in the previous section the sin of Adam and those of later individuals are different: Adam's sin was qualitative, whereas the individual is born in sin with a natural tendency to sin. Sexuality gives rise to the dread

1) George E. Arbaugh, George B. Arbaugh, Kierkegaard's Authorship, p. 170-71

that leads to that qualitative leap which causes the individual to become guilty much in the way that Adam did. Each person begins with sexual innocence but loses it as did Adam.

> "... unconscious sexuality produces in the individual follower of Adam a quantitative increase in dread, strengthening the tendency toward the qualitative leap." (1)

Sexuality is a base for dread in that it epitomizes the way in which the finite, temporal body is chained to the spirit. This produces a shame, not of the animal part of man that feels no shame, but of the spirit. For this is a departure from spirit, for the self's spiritual determination (that is freedom) has been shamed.

As this dread increases so does man's potentiality for sin increase until a point is reached where sin is generated of itself. But one must be careful not to attribute the cause of sin to dread for dread only produces the matrix or the conditions for sin, but it is the individual that willfully sins.

CONCLUSION

Dread has, as has been stated, a positive aspect to it as it helps the self to be spirit, that is, a self facing its possibilities and freedom. It enables one to transcend guilt-consciousness into a consciousness of one's sins before

1) Herman Diem, Kierkegaard an Introduction, p. 56

God where one may be open to grace and forgiveness. For Kierkegaard, in this movement, the will is the active agent. He suggests that because of the interplay of sin and spirit a higher evolutionary state has come about. For without sin man may have remained ignorant (in innocence). It is through dread that man discovers the possibility of a higher existence in spirituality before God. This state is never fully attained; on the contrary, so long as man lives the evolution of spirit towards God goes on. As McCarthy puts it in The Phenomenon of Moods in Kierkegaard:

> "... becoming is an essential aspect of one's being." (1)

This is the important aspect of dread, that it has the power to goad man to God. Subjective dread is a push towards infinitude, away from the fall into finitude. However, a man is at the same time confronted by his past, for what a man has done restricts what he may do in the future and this is again a cause of dread lest no possibilities be available to him in the future. This goes further back than one's own lifetime for life did not begin with the individual, so he must also consider the history that the race has imposed upon his own future actions.

The higher manifestation of dread, when confronted by infinitude, is despair which may later become offense. What distinguishes dread from despair is an individual's

1) Vincent A. McCarthy, The Phenomenon of Moods in Kierkegaard, p. 129

lack of inwardness. (1) Inwardness is the focus on one's own centre where one may discover the eternal. But in excluding this inwardness one despairs. Both dread and despair manifest the misrelationship in the self's synthesis, and in the Concept of Dread this misrelationship is viewed from the mental-emotional side. One despairs when one attempts to escape dread by seeking to find peace in himself or the things of this world; and when one withdraws from activity to avoid dread, then dread becomes a paralysis.

1) Gregor Malantschuk, Kierkegaard's Thought, p. 272

CHAPTER II - DESPAIR & DREAD

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the movement of despair in the self - its progression from unconscious despair to defiance - thus laying the framework for the next chapter in which despair will be discussed in respect to the three stages.

Kierkegaard uses the idea of 'double-mindedness' (1) in speaking of despair which Gregor Malantschuk states he found in the Epistle of St. James. (2)

The Sickness Unto Death is his one work dealing specifically with despair. It has a 'progressive and dialectical movement' from unconscious despair to offense against the Holy Spirit (despair of the forgiveness of sins). As James Collins states: it is

> "... a phenomenological description of the varieties of despair and characterizes the entire attitude of despair as one of weakness and sin." (3)

1) The Danish word for despair Fortvivlelse suggests a root meaning 'two' and thus implies a split or tearing apart, or into parts; a division. Nudansk Ordborg (Politikens Blaa Ordbøger), Politiken, København 1953, p. 263. Translated for me by Dr. Hans Moeller.

2) Gregor Malantschuk, Kierkegaard's Thought, p. 323

3) James Collins, The Mind of Kierkegaard, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954), p. 293

From this book we find that Kierkegaard views man as being in despair from his first conscious act to his last, never being able to relieve himself of this burden.

The Sickness Unto Death may be seen as the continuation of the Concept of Dread. As the Concept of Dread

> "... begins on the lowest level with the portrayal of the human situation and the resulting forms of misrelation in the synthesis expressed in anxiety (dread), and since The Sickness Unto Death deals with the higher forms of this misrelation, these two books are best suited to demonstrate the continuous dialectical line ..." (1)

Generally in Kierkegaard's writings despair is seen dialectically as the saving act of choosing to become a self and also of the taking on of sin consciousness, but in The Sickness Unto Death both despair and offense are viewed only in the negative aspects and therefore not as a means of healing. There is an implicit suggestion of the positive side of the dialectic but it is negligible. We have to look to the Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits for the positive aspect where the individual who 'wills one thing' may overcome despair through the grace of God.

Despair has basically to do with the interrelationship of the elements making up the human synthesis with the added dimension of this relationship being related to God.

1) Gregor Malantschuk, Kierkegaard's Thought, p. 339. Perry D. Le Fevre states in The Prayers of Kierkegaard, p. 169, that Kierkegaard's analysis of despair is systematic but artificial. Perhaps it is true that this work is systematic and artificial but it must be remembered that whenever one tries to analyse movement and change one must freeze the moment and then dissect it with just these results. One should not criticize Kierkegaard for this nor assume he was not aware of it.

Kierkegaard does not bid his reader to avoid the abyss of despair but to surmount it. He does not try to dismiss our suffering over this seemingly meaningless existence but rather bids us to struggle with life and with ourselves in order to understand that life's meaning comes from our standing before God in faith. For it is only in our stance before God that we may be prevented from being sickened by the absurdity of life. (This sickness Hamann calls a 'holy hypochondria'.)

DESPAIR

Dread is the confrontation of man with the eternal outside of himself, whereas the eternal within man is merely potential. At this point of the exclusion of inwardness (the eternal inside of man is excluded) we cross the borderline between dread and despair.

Despair is a manifestation of the self's misrelationship with the eternal and is dynamic, interacting with the growth of the person. It is distinct from dread although it stems from the same source (the struggle with possibility). The despair which is present without the awareness of the eternal is the borderline between dread and despair viewed from the side of despair. Despair to be rightly so called must be conscious of the eternal. As despair must be seen under the category of consciousness the most serious forms of despair are in those who are unaware that they are

in despair, whereas on the other hand, those most acutely aware of their despair are nearer to salvation, for they are more readily open to receiving the solution to this problem.

> "Despair, just because it is wholly dialectical, is in fact the sickness of which it holds that it is the greatest misfortune not to have had it - the true good hap to get it, although it is the most dangerous sickness of all, if one does not wish to be healed of it. In other cases one can only speak of the good fortune of being healed of a sickness, sickness itself being misfortune." (1)

No form of despair can be discussed without reflecting dialectically upon the opposite element in the synthesis. Despair over possibility must be seen in relationship with despair over necessity, and despair over the earthly must be seen in relationship with despair over the eternal.

> "With every increase in the degree of consciousness, and in proportion to that increase, the intensity of despair increases: the more conscious, the more intense the despair." (2)

The first step for the individual in despair is to choose oneself as spirit in relationship with the eternal, which may lead to spiritual growth. This relationship with the eternal infinitely potentiates the self for now the eternal is the norm. This makes sin a position for it is before God, that is to say God is the measure by which we know our deeds to be sin.

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 159

2) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 175

> "... a constituent of sin is the self as infinitely potentiated by the conception of God, and thus in turn it is the greatest possible consciousness of sin as deed. This is the expression for the fact that sin is a position; the positive factor in it is precisely this, that it is before God." (1)

Every despair is related to possibility, that is to say, is related to the fact that our actuality is far removed from what we should be before God (grounded in the Constituting Power). Man is aware of his separation from the eternal in his despair and his despair separates him from the eternal. As with other illnesses he does not become sick once but is sick continually in the present, becoming sick and being sick in the same instant. As spirit man is in a perpetually critical condition and there can be no 'immediate' health for the spirit (2) for despair remains so long as man lives. And while he lives he is moving either towards or away from the eternal.

Through despair man is emphasized as a higher synthesis; that is, despair does not manifest itself until a certain stage of growth has been arrived at, that of one's consciousness as a self before God.

Despair also shuts one up within one's predicament. That is what is meant by 'sickness unto death', that the self would want to die of this despair yet does not die. If one could die of despair then the eternal in the self would be capable of death .

1) Ibid, p. 230

2) Ibid, p. 158

and this, of course, is impossible. Therefore the individual despairs over his illness but also over the fact that he cannot die of his illness. As Kierkegaard puts it:

> "Thus it is that despair, this sickness in the self, is the sickness unto death. The despairing man is mortally ill. In an entirely different sense than can appropriately be said of any disease, we may say that the sickness has attacked the noblest part; and yet the man cannot die. Death is not the last phase of the sickness, but death is continually the last. To be delivered from this sickness by death is an impossibility ..." (1)

In despair, Kierkegaard states, it is freedom that despairs; (2) and why does it despair? Because it has become aware of necessity. It is the necessity of the self confronted by the eternal (possibility) and thus limiting the eternal; and so 'freedom' of choice is limited, thus causing despair. While man is not a self, that is, a perfect synthesis before God, there will always be this despair of freedom in the self. For this lack of the eternal is despair - it is this which causes the misrelationship within the self. Not to be aware of this inwardness wherein lies the eternal is not to 'speak' in the 'first person' but rather to speak childishly in the 'third person'. (3)

1) Ibid, p. 154

2) S. Kierkegaard, Søren Kierkegaard's Journals & Papers, p. 347

3) T. H. Croxall, Kierkegaard Studies, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), p. 84

When Kierkegaard speaks of despair it is the whole person he is referring to not some emotional state. Doubt is constrasted with despair to bring this point out. Doubt is an expression of thought only, there is a certain talent required to doubt, a keen intellect for example, whereas everyone despairs regardless of talent or social status. Despair in its relation to the absolute involves every aspect of man's make-up.

> "Doubt is a despair of thought, despair is a doubt of the personality." (1)

One must will to despair but once one wills despair it is transcended for one has willed in effect to choose the self. In freedom one has chosen; in choosing one chooses despair and in so doing chooses the absolute. For the individual is the one that ethically posits the absolute and the absolute is the self. (2)

Despair potentiates despair and guilt is the expression of this existential suffering. But despair clearly points to a higher self as its goal but what the individual needs is an understanding of the self and of the process required to achieve its end. The problem is how to overcome sin and thus become this higher self, especially as despair is a refusal to become the self, that is, make the movement toward this higher self in restoration before God, 'Repetition'.

1) S. Kierkegaard, Either/Or, v. 2, p. 178

2) This is further developed in Chapter III, Section 2 when I discuss the Ethical stage.

This refusal is sin and causes the misrelationship in the elements of the self-synthesis. It is, as has been stated, a refusal to be grounded in its constituting power. Sin is thus 'potentiated defiance'. Thus sin is increased in proportion to the consciousness of the self (we shall see more clearly how that develops in chapter 3). In Kierkegaard's own words, sin is

> "... after having been informed by a revelation from God what sin is, then before God in despair not to will to be oneself, or before God in despair to will to be oneself." (1)

When sin is despair one struggles against God by evading him but later when one despairs of God's forgiveness of sin it becomes a position taken against God's offer of grace. Sin may take on an offensive quality by one's abandoning Christianity as a falsehood. No despair is entirely without defiance. In speaking about the defiant in the Edifying Discourses Kierkegaard says:

> "Only the defiant could wish that Job had not existed, so that he might absolutely free his soul from the last vestiges of love which still remained in the plaintive shriek of despair; so that he might complain, aye, even curse life; so that there might be no consonance of faith and confidence and humility in his speech; so that in his defiance he might stifle the shriek so that it might not even seem as if there were anyone whom it defied." (2)

He says elsewhere of Job that it would have been, as Job's wife suggests, easier to curse God and have done with

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 227

2) S. Kierkegaard, Edifying Discourses, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), p. 132-33

it: **defiance** makes the suffering easier and to acknowledge God's love at such a moment is enough to drive one mad. (1) To believe that hardship is not only to be born but may also be good makes one's suffering less comfortable.

The act of completely despairing is the necessary first step to repentance. One must not only choose oneself through despair but also repent oneself. As the individual becomes aware of his actuality he becomes more and more consumed by the shame he feels as he stands before God. He is trapped to such a degree in an infinite recollection and remorse for past errors that he turns away from the future and rejects the present as the moment of decision. However, through the forgiveness of sins brought about by the crucifixion one comes to terms with one's past, recognizing the nature of one's relationship with God and realizing the consequences of one's break with God and knowing that that they have been forgiven. He has been set free to stand before God without shame or guilt. Here one has been transformed into a helpless sinner aware of his predicament but holding fast, in faith, to God. It is at this point that a 'mysterious fusion' occurs.

> "... the hold of finitude, temporality and necessity are annulled while at the same time they are preserved in a higher synthesis prepared by man's uncovering infinitude, the

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, p. 315-16

> eternal, and freedom and then by their grounding in the Constituting Power who restores the rupture and synthesizes the elements." (1)

This is the consequence of God's grace in the forgiveness of sins.

What must be emphasized here is the notion, 'before God'. It is he that turns our despair into sin for we, through him, become aware that the source of our despair is the rupture of our relationship with him.

In the restoration of this relationship we become aware that the temporal and the eternal are essentially opposed and that while being resigned to the eternal we have to maintain the rights of the temporal (for so long as we exist we are bound by the laws of temporality). We cannot extricate ourselves from our despair in this life but in relating ourselves to God we thereby receive the conditions of our liberation.

Faith which, Kierkegaard holds, is the opposite of sin is the condition of the self before God whereby the self is willing to accept the conditions of being a self, throwing away all speculations and becoming a subjective entity.

1) Vincent A. McCarthy, The Phenomenon of Moods in Kierkegaard, p. 130

Guilt is the only thing that can separate us from God. The smallest sin corrupts our relationship in that it disrupts our 'recollection' of him.

> "Guilt is thus qualitative not quantitative, it does not deal with the comparative, but only with "total determinants." It is the most concrete expression of existence, and the consciousness of guilt, therefore, is the decisive expression for an individual of his pathetic relationship to an eternal happiness..." (1)

The relationship between the individual and God thus becomes a relationship of guilt and that is how the individual expresses himself before God. However, let us not confuse being before God with being 'aware' of being before God. The reason for despair (conscious or not) is our being before God. But when the self is 'aware' of himself before God he is 'aware' of his 'sin' before God. The more 'aware' of himself as a sinner before God the more despair. This despair is grounded in the individual's failure to live with a singleness of purpose toward God. This entails spiritual passion displacing speculation and objectivity leading to complete dependence upon God. This denies us the comfort of comparison with others or even what we may conceive ourselves to be (as we may tend to see ourselves as more perfect than we are). God is the norm, perfection is our measuring stick, and we have fallen far short. This view of man may, of course, destroy us or it may provoke us toward God.

1) Carl N. Edwards, "Guilt in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard", Encounter, 27 (1966), p. 145

As Kierkegaard states in The Sickness Unto Death:

> "The believer perceives and understands, humanly speaking, his destruction (in what has befallen him and in what he has ventured), but he believes. Therefore he does not succumb. He leaves it wholly to God how he is to be helped, but he believes that for God all things are possible." (1)

CONCLUSION

Despair is both an advantage and a disadvantage when regarded dialectically. Looked upon abstractly it may be seen as a great advantage in that it drives man towards God, but in considering the individual crushed under its effects and tormented by it one can only consider it a curse.

Despair suggests the possibility of the individual's freedom as a spiritual creature relating to the eternal within him. This spiritual freedom places man on a height far above the rest of creation, but because of the nature of freedom there is always the danger that he might choose to fall into the abyss, losing both his freedom and himself. This freedom fills him with glory, pride - and dread. Dread, for he knows within himself that there is the misrelationship we call despair and he cries out to God for help, for he is man's only salvation. He may only retrieve

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 172

his freedom at this point by choosing the good, for evil is guilt and chained freedom. Only through God can man restore his past and conquer the future, for God is the source of the future in that all possibilities awaiting actualization in the present are in his hands. Only through faith may this be achieved.

Only through grounding oneself in God and obtaining the complete awareness of the double relationship which makes up the self can our possibilities be actualized in the direction of God. But throughout all this the individual is plagued by fear, the enemy of hope. Fear is the temerity and timidity of the spirit, preventing it from reaching out to God, and so spirit sinks deeper into the mire of despair. It is not ignorance which prevents man from accepting the challenge of the eternal, but the assumption that the good is impossible. This is despair.

CHAPTER III - DESPAIR & THE THREE STAGES OF LIFE

INTRODUCTION

Since Chapter II was in effect the introduction to Chapter III, laying out the framework through which one might grasp the concept of despair in a larger scope, here in this chapter we examine despair more closely as it interplays with Kierkegaard's three stages.

As we have already determined, despair is an affliction of the spirit in relation to God and as such man is constantly in a state of despair. But this cannot be contained (as it is spirit and therefore has something to do with the eternal) in some conceptual framework, in a 'systematic disclosure of reality'. Nonetheless for any study to take place reality must be made static for a moment so that one may not be overwhelmed by the dynamic flux of reality.

Kierekegaard's thought, as will be shown in this chapter, does not move in a straight line between the natural and the Christian but rather in a circle, coming back upon itself. That is to say, after the aesthetic stage, when the consciousness is awakened and directed towards God, one then begins anew in the ethical stage the struggle that was waged in the aesthetic; that is, the moving of the consciousness towards grounding oneself in the Constituting Power. There are different problems to overcome but the struggle remains

essentially the same: the raising of the conscious self. McCarthy sees parallels to this in the evolution of the fetus, and also in certain stages that man has to go through, which the race as a whole has passed through in its development to its present state: these stages are, beginning in man's prehistory which could be conceived as an immediate experience of his environment, through to man discovering the difference between right and wrong (the ethical stage) and ending in the present age with the yearning of man to be with God (or more precisely to discover his spirituality). (1) However, these stages are more clearly seen, perhaps, in man's spiritual growth paralleling the growth of religion (paganism, Judaism, Christianity).

> "Paganism represents a basically dreaming state of spirit, Judaism a waking, and Christianity the fully awakened." (2)

It is uncertain, however, how far this can be taken as many parallels may be drawn from a fertile imagination.

Kierkegaard in speaking of the individual's development designates five stages:

> "... the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. Two boundary zones correspond to these three: irony, constituting the boundary between the aesthetic and the ethical; humour as the boundary

1) Vincent A. McCarthy, The Phenomenon of Moods in Kierkegaard, p. 38

2) Ibid, p. 39

that separates the ethical from the religious." (1)

For our puposes we shall deal only with the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious for as has been said irony and humour are in effect only 'boundary zones'. These stages (or life-styles) are supposed to encompass the whole spectrum of life-styles available to mankind, the broad constitution of these stages may make this inclusiveness of life-styles possible, although it is to be admitted that in reality one's life is a mixture of these in varying degrees of weaknesses and strengths.

SECTION I - THE AESTHETIC

Kierkegaard uses the word 'aesthetic' in a more inclusive manner than does modern man (that holds it pertains to the beautiful and the sublime). This use is closer to the ancient Greek aisthēsis which could be rendered as immediate awareness or sensation (in the sense of hedonistic sensation).

There would seem to be two divisions within the aesthetic stage: immediacy and reflection. It is the absence of decision which unifies the aesthetic stage drawing together the two different stances stated above. Decision is the elemental factor of selfhood, for Kierkegaard, hence in the aesthetic stage there is no self.

1) S. Kierkegaard, Unscientific Postscript, p. 448

The self (so called for want of a better word for it is an entity without decision-making ability and hence for Kierkegaard no self) has an innate propensity in the aesthetic stage to become an 'actual' self (or spirit) but the latent spirit avenges itself by oppressive dread when the self denies the spirit's liberation and consciously abandons the hope of fulfilling life's demands by pursuing the ways of the world. (1) By doing this the aesthete's existence is dictated by conditions outside of himself, in that his joy or unhappiness is a matter of fate working upon him. He cannot rise above fortunes or misfortunes of the world and so he is victimized by them. This results in the spirit's frustration leading to melancholy and eventually even to despair. But there is a despair of the aesthetic bordering on dread:

> "In unconsciousness of being in despair a man is furthest from being conscious of himself as spirit. But precisely the thing of not being conscious of oneself as spirit is despair, which is spiritlessness - whether the condition be that of complete deadness, a merely vegetative life, or a life of high potency the secret of which is nevertheless despair." (2)

But the aesthetic concept of spiritlessness is by no means normative for what despair really is, for the aesthete is incapable of determining what spirit truly is. The aesthete cannot answer a question which does not exist for him.

1) Kierkegaard states on p. 158 of The Sickness Unto Death that "all immediacy, in spite of its illusory peace and tranquility, is dread, and hence, quite consistently, it is a dread of nothing."

2) Ibid, p. 178

This despair is latent and does not know itself. As the aesthete evolves a little he becomes aware that he is in despair over something, but this is not really despair.

> "It is the beginning, or it is as when the physician says of a sickness that it has not yet declared itself." (1)

It is in this state that the dialectic of immediacy becomes the 'agreeable and the disagreeable' and its conceptions are 'good fortune and misfortune' (fate). (2)

Despair over the earthly does not have infinite consciousness of itself, for its despair is passive, succumbing to outward pressures and circumstances; it is no inward action of the spirit; fate denies a man and he becomes an unfortunate creature. That is to say, immediacy receives such a blow as not to be able to recover and so despairs.

He mistakes his despair over 'something' for real despair, for the eternal is unknown to him. But the minute his outward circumstances change and his desires are fulfilled he once again begins to live, immediacy rises up, and he is well and happy.

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 152

2) Ibid, p. 184

We see here how aesthetes are greatly affected by the accidents of life. They are unable to be sustained by their will power, but because of 'good fortune' this is hidden from them. As Kierkegaard states the case:

> "Let us see now why they despair. It is because they discovered that what they built their life upon was transient? But is that, then, a reason for despairing? Has any essential change occurred in that upon which they built their life? Is it an essential change in the transitory that it shows itself to be transitory? Or is it rather not something accidental and unessential in the case of what is transitory that it does not show itself to be such? Nothing has happened which could occasion a change. So if they despair, it must be because they were in despair before hand. The only difference is that they did not know it. But this is an entirely fortuitous difference. So it appears that every aesthetic view of life is despair, and that everyone who lives aesthetically is in despair whether he knows it or not." (1)

He goes on to say that when one becomes aware of it then a higher form of existence is imperative, a declared despair over oneself.

The movement of the aesthetic predicament is exemplified in Kierkegaard's depiction of Don Juan seducing women. (2) The problems arise when he discovers that he may not come too close to these ladies, as he is in need of a certain detachment from them to play his cunning games.

1) S. Kierkegaard, Either/Or, v. 2, p. 162

2) He also exemplifies the aesthete's dilemma in the figures of Faust and Ahasuerus, the wandering Jew.

The very distance he cannot do without therefore cuts the aesthete off from society. There is apprehension in that intuitive flash. There is a dread deep within him but this dread is also his vital source of energy. It is not a self reflective dread but rather a substantial dread, the power of sensuality, the demonic joy of life. (1)

As the initial period of success wears off, the aesthete is doomed to a frenzied attempt to maintain and heighten the distracting pleasure, which is followed by the boredom of saturation. This boredom drives the aesthete deeper into despair. The more he devours his aesthetic pleasures the less there will remain for the next time, and the next level of satisfaction will take even more skill and effort to achieve. This haunts the aesthete and scars his pleasure.

But there comes a time when the spirit, as it were, is ripe and demands a higher form in which to apprehend itself. This is not a necessary or logical next step but rather is a conscious, internal decision

> "... in which the individual puts an end to mere possibility and identifies himself with the content of his thought in order to exist in it." (2)

This involves a radically decisive act, a leap. This is characterized by two simultaneous acts: the embracing of

1) S. Kierkegaard, Either/Or, v. 1, p. 235

2) S. Kierkegaard, Unscientific Postscript, p. 302

despair and the realization that a life grounded upon faith in temporal immediacies is a life of hopelessness.

When the self does manage to achieve some self reflection despair is modified to a degree. As there is more consciousness of self there can be more of an understanding of what despair is, and knowledge of one's dilemma. But this form of despair is passive, that is to say, a desire not to be onself.

Yet on the other hand if the self, at this point, decides to accept itself it discovers difficulties within the composition of the self. This may frighten him away, or it may cause a break with immediacy or the possibility of discovering something which may be the cause of a break with immediacy. (1) Because he has a sense that there may be something eternal within himself he is able, to a degree, to disassociate himself from the external world. But this is only a tentative beginning for he has little consciousness of himself and no ethical reflection and therefore cannot break wholly with immediacy.

He needs a consciousness of self derived from an infinite abstraction from all externals - this is the first step of the infinite self towards the acceptance of his actual self with all its problems and strengths. (2)

1) This is done through the imagination wherein all possibility lies.

2) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 188

But if a change is to occur one first has to totally despair; perhaps then the spirit might be able to break through. But if he dare not let this change come about he attempts to cure himself of despair through forgetfulness, drowning the self in the world of externals. In doing so no change ever occurs which might either produce greater despair or lead him onto faith.

In effect this man rejects Kierkegaard's call to choose despair; he prefers to hide from himself his desparate situation rather than taking the first step in the direction of selfhood through choosing despair. Choosing despair, to quote D. M. Emmet, means:

> "You must dare to let go of your grasp of these finite things - 'interesting' theories, social recognition, and so forth by which you try to hide the abyss from yourself, and you must look consciously into it." (1)

In choosing despair one must come to admit without qualification that he has lived his life upon shifting sand, a condition which was not within his power to control and that he has been in this predicament all the time, that is, he has been **ontically in despair** without being aware of it. After having acknowledged this,

1) D. M. Emmet, Kierkegaard and the "Existential Philosophy", p. 260. This Heideggarian interpretation of Kierkegaard, Emmet states, may not be without distortion; however, in my opinion this rendering seems to be quite an accurate interpretation of what Kierkegaard intends.

only then can he go forward to rectify the situation taking his life wholly under his control. By doing so he reaches the non-transitory or the eternal, in that he reaches the eternal within himself which is within his power to sustain throughout his life regardless of the changing tides of fortune. Thus the individual takes responsibility for himself and hence has chosen himself ethically. Here the self essentially belongs to the self or is in the process of coming to exist as an actual self. The whole of the aesthetic self with its many varying determinations is swallowed up into the ethical self; nothing is lost, but all is changed by the choice of the self. Here man's spirit becomes actualized. He becomes a self when his aesthetic being, that is the psycho-physical synthesis, relates to itself through choosing itself as an ethical task. Hence he is existentially liberated from his immediacy. Kierkegaard states:

> "... for conscious despair there is requisite on the one hand the true conception of what despair is. On the other hand, clearness is requisite about oneself -" (1)

For those who refuse to choose despair it may be that they are unwilling to become dialectical within themselves or that they cannot reach any understanding of misfortune. If they are unable to be rid of the misfortune that plagues them they lose any poise in bearing it. They believe always

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 180

that it will just go away because they believe it to be a foreign thing. If it does not they despair; that is, there is a breakdown of immediacy.

The aesthetic life leads to despair and in the end any depiction of the aesthetic way of life must be one of bankruptcy.

SECTION II - THE ETHICAL

Johansen in Kierkegaard on the Tragic states that:

> "The ethical has a somewhat anaemic touch in Kierkegaard." (1)

He goes on to say that in the Point of View he mentions only the 'duplicity between the aesthetic and the religious'. The ethical is a transition point 'strict and harsh' between the life of immediacy and the religious life. It is a state of equilibrium between the outward and the inward, between the finite and the eternal, the quantitative (aesthetic) and the qualitative (religious). As it is true that the amount of ink devoted to the ethical stage in the Point of View is minimal, that does not mean that the stage itself is insignificant. In the very fact that it is a transition phase which holds together the two others it is of very great importance, as is crawling in the development of the child's ability to walk. It is

1) Karsten F. Johansen, Kierkegaard on the Tragic, p. 140

here that man becomes aware of the eternal within him, here where he is able to choose and here where he has the possibility of falling or rising to the call of the eternal which is to culminate in the next stage, Christianity.

The fundamental characteristic of the ethical stage is that the self becomes the centre of the decision-making process. This comes with self consciousness enabling possibilities to be seen which decisions may actualize. Decision-making is a constitutive factor of the self; before this the self is only potentiality. At the ethical stage the self is capable of willing its imagined possibilities into existence. But these possibilities are not randomly selected but are guided by the society (the acquired history) in which he lives. This history is part of his victory gained over the aesthetic:

> "... The possibility of gaining a history becomes the ethical victory of continuity over concealment, melancholy, illusory passion, and despair." (1)

The aesthetic stage is not lost in the ethical for the stages are dialectically related. The things that characterize the aesthetic stage are retained within the personality (e.g. desire), but they no longer determine the self absolutely but are brought into subjugation. The ethical,

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Unscientific Postscript, p. 227

therefore, transforms the aesthetic stage.

> "The ethical, you think, is something totally different from the aesthetical, and when it prevails it destroys the other entirely ... In despair there is an instant when it comes to be as you say, and if a man has not felt this, his despair has been deceitful and he has not ethically chosen himself. However, it is not so, and therefore the next instant despair reveals itself not as a break but as a metamorphosis. Everything comes back, but comes back transfigured." (1)

The ethical is, in a dialectical sense, closer to the truth than the aesthetic since the aesthete is unconscious of his despair, and to come close to the truth one must understand despair in a positive way, as a spur goading one towards God. The ethicist who is conscious of his despair and yet willingly remains in despair is much farther from the truth and from salvation than is the aesthete, for the ethicist is in a more intense despair. However, once the awareness of despairing over something earthly is indeed affirmed there is an advance made in the self's evolution toward God. For to despair over the earthly is in effect despairing over God, for to give such importance, such great value to any external is to make it absolute, to transform it into a God in one's eyes. But in the ethical stage the choice is of oneself as spirit and therefore has something to do with the eternal.

1) S. Kierkegaard, Either/Or, v. 2, p. 227

> "... the expression which sharply differentiates between the ethical and the aesthetic is this: it is every man's duty to reveal himself -" (1)

As we have seen, in the aesthetic stage despair is depicted as a willingness not to be onself. In the ethical, on the other hand, this becomes despair at will-to be oneself. However, the basic formula is the same:

> "To despair over oneself, in despair to will to be rid of oneself." (2)

In the ethical, that self which, despairingly, one desires to be is not really one's self at all for to be one's own self is in effect the opposite of despair. This self which one despairingly wishes to be is a self separated from God, an entity put up against God, for to truly be a self is to be a self grounded in God and in that state there is no despair. (3)

To put this more clearly, there is a timeless element in man, though his temporal being may not be aware of it in the aesthetic stage while it is preoccupied with responding to temporal stimuli. This timeless element is the ethical norm, which, it could be argued, is intrinsic to

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Unscientific Postscript, p. 227

2) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 153

3) Kierkegaard states that this separation from God "means to be desperately narrow minded and mean-spirited. Here of course it is only a question of ethical meanness and narrowness (resulting from) being entirely finitized, by having become, instead of a self, a number, just one man more ..." The Sickness Unto Death, p. 166

man's being and is immutable. (1) This, of course, suggests that in the ethical stage a choice of the authentic self implies a despair of the relative self, that is the self in its empirical determinants. Here he may create the essential condition for an ultimate distinction between good and evil, for to posit the self is to posit the good and so create such a norm. In so doing he realizes how far short of his ideal self his actual self falls; he realizes himself, at this point, as a sinner. For although he chooses himself completely there are still elements in the self which he would like to disown. This dilemma can be so profound that he may wish to be rid of himself.

This is the despair of the ethicist over his weakness, for instead of embracing faith he becomes absorbed in his weakness and thus deeply absorbed in despair. He becomes vividly aware of his despair about the eternal, despairing that he could have given such unquestioned value to the earthly. This is expressed in his despair over the possibility of losing the eternal and himself. He does not wish, here, to be his empirical self for he does not want to recognize the weakness of the self. He cannot forget his

1) John W. Elrod states in his article Feuerbach and Kierkegaard on the Self, p. 359, "... For Kierkegaard God is synonymous with duty in the ethical stage of existence. The "ought" is identified as divine. God and duty are identical. This is Kierekegaard's way of stressing the absolute and binding character of the "ought" in human existence."

weakness and hates his self for it and will not allow his self to be humbled in faith. This Kierkegaard calls introversion (1) and is the opposite of immediacy. Kierkegaard states that it is the sort of despair rarely met with in the world. The more this despair becomes spiritual (aware of the self as being in despair) the more it shrewdly keeps it closed up within itself, and the more demonically aware it is of showing the outward appearance of indifference.

If, on the other hand, the despairing self is passive we still have the same result, 'despair at not willing to be oneself'; however, the response is different, it is the response of servitude, of passive suffering. The self regards its weakness as so profound that it cannot be healed by God; it has no hope that God can do anything for it that it might gain salvation, and so it willingly accepts its sins as an eternal burden. This causes the self to be offended at all of existence. In spite of this suffering the self wants to be itself, though not without its burden, for this would mean that the self was resigned to God's will (a power over him) (2). The self will not hear of the eternal comfort in God as this would mean he could not bear witness against God.

> "It is (to describe it figuratively) as if an author were to make a slip of the pen, and that this clerical error became conscious of

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 197

2) Ibid, p. 204

> being such - perhaps it was no error but in a far higher sense was an essential constituent in the whole exposition - it is then as if this clerical error would revolt against the author, out of hatred for him would forbid him to correct it, and were to say, "No, I will not be erased, I will stand as a witness against thee, that thou art a poor writer." (1)

When the despairer in this way wills desperately to be himself, this is defiance. The despairer lives his hour to hour existence not for God but in a state of preoccupation with his self. (2)This despair, at a closer scrutiny, is in fact pride. For what else could give such importance to weakness? It was the despairer's desire to be proud of himself which made it impossible for him to bear his weakness. (3) Despair over one's weakness is defiance. Here one, because he has become aware of the reason that he does not want to be himself, (because he is aware of his imperfections) despairingly wishes to be himself (that is chooses out of pride to stand 'as he is' not before God but grudgingly against him). It is in reaction to the 'abuse of the eternal' in the self. The self is not willing to lose itself to regain itself, the passageway to faith, but is determined to be itself in its own way.

Therefore the despairing self attempts all forms of experiments and tests, acknowledging no power greater than his own over himself; there is no God over him, but

1) Ibid, p. 207

2) Ibid, p. 198

3) Ibid, p. 199

he stands as if watching himself in a mirror, declaring himself to be God. But no derived constituted being can be more than it is and this is what makes all his declarations and experiments hollow.

This mounting awareness of the self in the ethical stage and the increase in consciousness of despair reveals with a certainty that the externals are not responsible for his condition. On the contrary, it is self imposed.

In order to want to be oneself one must be aware of the ideal self, which is only an abstract possibility. This is what the self desires to be: separate from God or even from the notion that there may be a God. With the help of this ideal self the actual self wishes either to be rid of itself (its weaknesses) or make its actual self to coincide with the ideal, which is impossible as the ideal and the actual can never coincide.

In this stage the ethicist becomes aware of the eternal within him and if in this stage the choice he makes of himself is as a whole, actual self, including the shadowy evils which reside within him, then he has made the choice of himself in repentance, a choice which recognizes the weaknesses and imperfections within the self and the total dependence upon God for salvation.

Man can only be himself and be rid of his self's imperfections through his faith in God's forgiveness. Man must be shown that he is not in himself sufficient for

himself unless he chooses himself before God. For the choice of oneself in the full knowledge of oneself is only possible before God, as sin only emerges when one is confronted by God as the norm of existence.

Yet what of the ethicist that attempts the ethical and yet fails? It is to be supposed that each self has the volition through which to bring about success if the desire and the zeal is applied to the problem at hand. If the ethicist fails he is expected to attempt to solve the problem again as his efforts were obviously not enough the first time. But what if with added effort the failure is repeated and repeated and repeated, with increasing effort each time, and yet still the goal eludes him? Because of the inner-directedness of his own actions the guilt level grows proportionately greater with each successive failure. Consequently one's self-esteem is lessened and the volition dwindles with each failure. Here the ethicist falls into a downward cycle of despair.

Or there may arise a problem from the many and varying responsibilities which might provoke ethical conflicts. These necessities imposed upon the ethicist by clashes of duty cannot be nullified merely by doing one's duty, for when this abstract demand of duty comes into existence there will be conflicts, or mutually exclusive duties. In attempting to rectify this problem the ethicist places

his problems at God's feet in the hopes that God will recognize his frailty and not demand the impossible of him. The problem arises again when to his dismay he finds that God does demand more than man can perform. This is despair of the ethical self. Here another choice must be faced: to remain in the ethical and do what one can, or to make the leap into the religious sphere.

SECTION III - RELIGIOUSNESS

In this section one comes to the culmination of the awareness of one's self. Being most consciously aware of oneself one is also the most in despair.

This section will deal primarily with Kierkegaard's conception of Christianity. Although Kierkegaard divides Religiousness in two (A and B), Religiousness A will be dealt with only in passing in order to keep to the theme of this essay. Religiousness A seems to be, for Kierkegaard, adherence to a subjective conceptualization of God whereas this thesis is dealing primarily with man's inward trek towards the transcendent God. Also, it must be pointed out that Kierkegaard is more concerned with the process of coming to belief rather than the settled state of belief and therefore his depiction of Christianity is, as in the other stages, dynamic and dialectical. Religiousness A, according to Dewey (1), seems to be based on the nineteeth

1) Bradley R. Dewey, "Kierkegaard on Suffering: Promise and Lack of Fulfillment in Life's Stages," Humanitas 9 (1973), 32

century Danish state church, though other representatives of this kind of religiousness have existed and do exist, even within Christianity. This form of religion is 'privatized', located in the believer's innermost spiritual life. It is a religion of immanence. It requires no outward show of faith but rather points to the individual's conception of God manifest in the emotions of popular piety. This liberal theology of the nineteenth century Danish state church is equated with what is best in humanity; all religious people partake in this well of 'religious feelings'.

But what happens when an individual's religious feelings strive for expression? Because of the emphasis on 'interiority' and the lack of normative control these feelings may well join forces with the worst of man's instincts. That is, without any true revelation of who and what God is man may indulge in all the idolotrous ways of ages gone by accompanied by their respective practices (licentiousness or human sacrifice). He deludes himself and may also delude others into a pseudo-religiosity, leaving everyone to act as their own 'priest and prophet' claiming their own special version of the truth.

This lack of spiritual norms or accountability may lead to licence and chaos. In Religiousness A, then, there would appear to be many temptations and pressures which may diminish the true religious feelings.

Christianity is sharply contrasted with this cultural religion (Religiousness A). Here the self is confronted by Christ, and the formula used all along still holds true: a self in despair not willing to be itself, or a self in despair willing to be itself but despairing over the forgiveness of sins. Weakness is related to the former and defiance to the latter. Weakness, being offended, dares not believe, and defiance being offended, will not believe. But here in Religiousness B one is not simply oneself but oneself as a sinner, and so weakness and defiance are the converse of what they normally are.

> "Ordinarily weakness is: in despair not to will to be oneself. Here this is defiance; for here it is clearly defiance not to will to be the man one is, a sinner, and for this reason to will to dispense with the forgiveness of sins. Ordinarily defiance is: in despair to will to be oneself. Here this is weakness: in despair to will to be oneself, a sinner, in such wise that there is no forgiveness." (1)

The norm determines one's conception of one self. The lower the norm, religiously speaking, the higher the individual deems himself; the higher the norm the lower the individual deems himself. In the case of the Christian, Christ is the norm, the goal of mankind, and hence the more the self becomes aware of itself in comparison with Christ the more it is aware of its sinfullness. The self has its meaning and the

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 244

truth of its existence in the self's pursuit of the norm. This affirms and completes man's struggle for self-consciousness.

However, stepping into the realm of Christianity the would be Christian is confronted by a problem that offends his sensibilities as a rational man, for at the heart of Christianity lies an obvious logical paradox: the eternal entering time (God becoming man). As moderns, steeped in the legacy of Greek logical thought added to and developed by modern philosophers, we find this an impossibility accomplished only through a form of intellectual sacrifice.

Since it was an assumption of Kierkegaard that the temporal and the eternal are 'separate and distinct' (1), one way in which Kierkegaard uses paradox is to signify the meeting of these two realms in the experience of the individual. It is the synthesis of this juxtaposed relationship of time and eternity. There would appear to be no irrationalism in the existential sense. The paradox here is simply Kierkegaard's method of explaining truth's (the eternal's) relation to the existing individual (the temporal). Truth is a paradox simply because the two realms are so radically different. Yet

1) Alastair McKinnon, Kierkegaard: Paradox and Irrationalism, p. 405. In the logical sense of paradox it becomes more difficult. McKinnon designates five distinct senses: "the dialectical, the systematically incomprehensible, the self-contradictory, the historically dependent, and the apparently contradictory." (p. 406)

Kierkegaard knew that any valid change must come from the believer accepting a seemingly contradictory claim leading to a transformation of his ideas based upon this claim. In so doing he transcends the paradox.

The necessity of confronting the paradox is obvious. If one could circumvent the paradox then one would return to the realm of cultural religion (Religiouness A); if on the other hand the paradox were removed then the final step from sin to faith would be a purely human accomplishment. Sin would, hence, cease to be a position (the qualitative difference between man and God) and, the doctrine of the incarnation of God would be replaced by pantheism.

It is this paradox which lies at the centre of Christianity; it is the only way man may successfully establish a relationship with the absolute. As I have stated Religiousness A does not see the paradox, the eternal intersecting time, and so cannot come to grips with sin in any significant way. Religiousness A is never aware of the self before God in such a way as to see despair as being sin. In Religiousness A, certainly, man is guilty but not in relation to God. He is not aware that it is precisely this offense which is the individual's greatest hope. For offense (sin) seems to be a necessary preliminary to Christianity. Before God our despair becomes potentiated infinitely and faith becomes our only possible recourse.

We see here Kierkegaard's desperate fight against the cultural Christianity of his day as well as the philosophical systems. Christ is the only possible way to salvation. The believer loses his understanding in the despair which leads to faith. (1) However, speculative philosophy tends to try and explain away the paradox; and even though these philosophers despair of really understanding they do not despair completely. The philosopher, because he does not despair completely, retains part of his optimism of discovering an answer. The philosopher may only become a believer when his philosophy no longer supports his optimism, his life view, and his despair is complete. When this has transpired then he can open himself to the call of faith forsaking the objective knowledge of philosophy. Faith can never be objective knowledge (and hence within the realm of philosophy). Objective knowledge may be able to deal with abstract being but not with actual existence. The notion of coming into being is beyond the realm of philosophy and so for Kierkegaard faith transcends and is a higher achievement than philosophical reflection.

But in dialectical opposition to objective knowledge there is the understanding of faith, an understanding which

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Unscientific Postscript, p. 202

Job knew well, an understanding without despair, faith.

> "In the same instant that everything was taken from him he knew that it was the Lord who had taken it, and therefore in his loss he remained in understanding with the Lord; he looked upon the Lord and therefore he did not see despair." (1)

Philosophical understanding threatens to devour faith, and the individual must through his will exert a great deal of effort in order not to confuse knowledge with faith. When this understanding despairs faith is there to point the way in order to prevent the exchanging of one philosophical point of view for another. That is to say, faith takes one completely from the realm of philosophical understanding so that when one despairs philosophically one does not exchange one philosophical system for another much as Augustine was tempted to do in his search for the truth, but rather grounds the restless searcher after truth in the 'Constituting Power', God.

Faith is the self which is completely aware of itself as a sinner and which makes no attempt to deny this adhering totally to God but has the full certainty of the forgiveness for his sins. Faith is not:

> "... an aesthetic emotion but something far higher, precisely because it has resignation as its presupposition; it is not an immediate instinct of the heart, but is the paradox of life and existence." (2)

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Edifying Discourses, v. 1, p. 144-5

2) S. Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, p. 58

Faith is the unifying experience of existence, allowing for an understanding in God of all things in creation. An attempt to make sense of the confusing multiplicity of creation without faith leads to despair made even more poignant by a presentiment of possible unity (i.e. a grounding in the Constituting Power) as occurred in the case of Abraham. His faith is a

> "... presentiment of its object at the extremest level of the horizon, yet is separated from it by a yawning abyss within which despair carries on its game." (1)

Abraham believed and believed here and now in this existence, or else he would have thrown all away and rushed headlong out of this world. Yet he had the total dependence on God required from a believer. This is the faith required from all those who believe in Christ, disconcerting as it may be to think that what happened to Abraham might again happen to anyone of us at any time or in any place. To deny that it could happen again is to deny that God is God, and yet to accept that it could happen again is to live with the thought that God may impose upon us the same trial. This living on the brink Kierkegaard urges us to nurture, suffering the constant discomfort and apprehensiveness this entails. But the believer is strong enough to accomplish this for he

> "... possesses the eternally certain antidote

1) Ibid, p. 35

> to despair, viz. possibility; for with God all things are possible every instant. This is the sound health of faith which resolves contradictions." (1)

Every man has within him the possibility for faith; all he need do is to will it constantly. Faith according to Kierkegaard is acquired through our will to be ourselves and to see ourselves as we truly are before God. No one can be given faith or be persuaded from unbelief to belief. This can only be done through a leap of faith and this must be repeated every moment to retain faith. Radical doubt is never overcome and must be struggled with every day; the possibility exists that the suffering of that tumultuous tension may be unendurable. (2)

The reverse side of faith is sin (offense). (3) This is the negative response to God's love. Offense appears in the more advanced stage of a person's spiritual development and belongs specifically to the Christian sphere.

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 173

2) Bradley R. Dewey, Kierkegaard on Suffering, p. 42

3) Kenneth Hamilton in "Kierkegaard on Sin", Scottish Journal of Philosophy 17 (1964), 302, states that Kierkegaard is well within Lutheran teaching here, that faith and sin can be expressed in terms of opposition.

Offense is somewhat like envy turned against oneself: man cannot accept the possibility which God has offered him, of salvation, and so is offended. He despairs of ever having his sins forgiven for he wonders (as did the Jews of Christ's time) how a man can forgive sins. (1) So his despair, potentiated into sin, sinks even deeper and the sinner recoils from God saying there is no forgiveness of sin. When the sinner is thus moving away from a relationship with God this then becomes a 'new sin'.

Sin against the Holy Spirit is the positive form of offense. It is here that the self is the most potentiated in despair. All of Christianity is cast away with the declaration that it is a lie. The self (shorn of all possibility) cannot accept itself at this point and is at its most despairing. It is not the blessed 'despair' of being unable to satisfy God's 'requirements', for he has let go of God and has set himself adrift in the abyss without 'possibility' of salvation, (2) despairing in the knowledge of his wretched end.

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, p. 249

2) S. Kierkegaard, The Unscientific Postscript, p. 123

CONCLUSION

As we have seen throughout the stages the disunity of 'double-mindedness' is the expression of despair. This despair becomes more poignant in proportion with the growth of consciousness towards self awareness and is indeed a reaction against consciousness. In the aesthetic stage the aesthete is motivated by an urge to overcome consciousness in order to enjoy the aesthetic sensations and to blot out the 'unfortunate' occurrences of fate. But this is prevented by the growth of consciousness through its becoming more aware of itself. In realizing what he desires to do consciousness thwarts his plans.

Here consciousness has awakened into the ethical stage and will not stop until it has made its decision for or against God in the religious stage, where he is most transparently aware of himself and his state. But it must be emphasized that these stages are not progressive but may exist side by side in one degree or another in any individual.

Despair is only overcome in moments of faith but these are only moments, as 'radical doubt' constantly plagues the believer. So long as man is a temporal being he is a sinner and so long as he is a sinner he despairs

and this despair emphasizes his sin, the awareness of his sin and his need for forgiveness. It is, as Kierkegaard succintly states,

> "... perfectly true that only terror to the point of despair develops a man to his utmost - though of course many succumb during the cure." (1)

There is no escape from the suffering of despair. Each stage begins by offering the promise of escape but in each is found the despair peculiar to that stage. This discourages any who might assume that the stages lead from worst to best. In effect it might be said that if despair increases with conscious awareness, then despair in the religious stage is the most desperate. For the higher the self becomes the more differences he has despaired over (2) between his actual self and his norm, either ethically (his ideal self) or religiously (God).

Although the despairing self may even find comfort in the knowledge that his sins may be forgiven, still he is hesitant about acknowledging himself a sinner, and the self scrutiny that is carried on at the religious level is intense and taxing, forcing him to see in himself that which he hates.

It was stated in the Introduction to this thesis that despair is both the 'blessing and the curse' of the

1) S. Kierkegaard, The Journals, p. 417

2) S. Kierkegaard, Either/Or, v. 1, p. 192

self. Throughout this study the attempt has been made to show how a positive response to despair has led one to expand one's conscious awareness of the self in the direction of seeing one's position before God and, in the end, to stand before God, conscious of one's sins, begging for and accepting God's forgiveness. A negative response to despair on the other hand is a continual rebellion and flight not only from God but from one's true self. It is the torture and the wretchedness of the self separated from God.

The expanded awareness of self consciousness is not enough to make one truly one's self, for to stand as a self apart from God is to stand in opposition to God and hence to one's true self which is grounded in God. God (through Jesus Christ) is the norm for the self in existence.

Returning to God is the completion of the circle begun in the moment of dread leading to the Fall. Yet, through Christ, one is transcended onto a higher sphere through the knowledge gained in existence. Man, in the beginning dwelt before God in innocence and has lived separated from him in despair. Now through our empty longing the self is spurred back towards God carrying the knowledge and experiences of existence with him. Man fell in the beginning as a race and has the predisposition, as an individual, to fall. So all mankind, as individuals, must approach God, goaded on by despair, and ask for forgiveness.

Despair is the state in existence which may either crush or cure one and it is up to the individual to choose. There is no universal salvation in Kierkegaard, it is an either/or proposition. One wonders how many have the volition and the courage to stand transparently before the 'Constituting Power' and how many would rather remain in the childish state of immediacy, content to while away the hours of existence until they finally run out, never knowing themselves or their God - seeing only through a glass darkly.

APPRENDIX I: REPETITION

What Kierkegaard is pointing to in depicting this ever-enlarging flow of consciousness is a 'repetition'. The concept of repetition is an attempt to make some kind of comment about movement, not biological or metaphysical movement, but an existential movement which is to be found in the transcendent sphere of freedom. It occurs "by virtue of the absurd". Consequently the transformation considered here is such that neither science nor metaphysics may ever discuss it, but only dogmatics. For repetition begins in faith and faith is the source of all dogmatics.

What comes about in the religious sphere is a faith/existence which is held between two polarities which may be manifest in different ways: will/providence, grace/obedience, faith/works. It is a dialectical relationship between the one who believes and Jesus Christ.

In repetition one remains 'eternally young' because one has been reborn. No longer does one's past actuality dominate the present, shutting off the future. Having finally accepted one's self and all the inherent implications, one can now move freely into the future, participating in the process of becoming. Furthermore the three stages now co-exist in a correct relationship to one another, for here the restoration of the health of the self (salvation) has occurred.

It is a restitution to an original condition as the Danish word Gentagelsen suggests: 'take anew', 'taking again'. What we in effect take anew is ourselves, the Christian new birth of John 3:4. But Gentagelsen also implies that something has been added to the broken personality which is taken up again in its pristine form. Perhaps what has been added is the knowledge that we gained from our struggle to overcome ourselves and existence in our climb towards God, for we are not the innocents we were when we began (dreaming innocence). There is a heightening of consciousness to the "second power" culminating in a sort of 'divine madness'. It is a consciousness no longer sealed in resignation but one that will assure passage 'across the boundaries of the marvellous' into that sphere on the opposite side of despair.

Repetition is not a new concept but may have been borrowed (and modified) from the ancient Greek concept of Recollection, the difference being that, although both attempt to reach the eternal through intimations in the present, the Greeks looked backwards into Recollection whereas Repetition looks forward. This is perhaps similar to the Aristotelian idea of Kinesis, the movement from possibility to actuality. Out of nonbeing, being emerges.

Repetition is freedom and fears only movement away from the eternal. To will repetition demands control over decision, and also a leap. It is actual and not theoretical, not merely something to contemplate but to actualize. It is the eternal.

This then is the religiousness of Kierkegaard - to bring about the Kingdom of God; that is, to actualize in every individual a knowledge of the eternal and have a world under the kingship of God. Once we were innocent but we fell from those dizzying heights. Through our will and God's grace we have climbed back up, albeit changed. Now we are called upon to repeat this state of innocence, though in a renewed form. This is Kierkegaard's messianic Christianity; wrought through tears and suffering and also through the awareness of the abyss which separates us not only from our fellow man but most importantly from God - the abyss of despair.

APPENDIX II: THE ABYSS (OR NOTHINGNESS)

In discussing despair the key element in Kierkegaard's assessment of it seems to be separation: separation from ourselves, from the world and from God. What is this separation? - it would appear to be the abyss. It is the abyss that surrounds each one of us, isolating and suffocating each one of us in a 'cloud of unknowing', of unconsciousness. This abyss would appear to be despair. But in effect are the two, indeed, synonymous?

We must remeber that the abyss is nothingness and as such indescribable, uncategorizable. Indeed, if anything were able to be said about the abyss then it would not be the abyss at all. Another thing that we must remember is that despair, as Kierkegaard clearly stated, is a mood. A mood is definable and has characteristics whereby it is known (moods reflect the difference between man's actuality and his potentiality p. 9, and manifest themselves in the behaviour of the individual). Therefore the moods are 'something' and not 'nothing'. So the abyss and despair are not synonymous. How then do the two relate?

It seems clear that despair is man's response to his awareness of the abyss which surrounds him. In the aesthetic stage man becomes aware of his separation from his fellow man and the things which give him pleasure; in the ethical stage man is made aware of his separation from himself (that is, the separation of his actual self from his potential self) and finally in the religious stage man is

made aware of his separation from God. Each awareness of the abyss creates in man a response of despair, despair over never being able to transcend the abyss and become or achieve that which he desires.

The abyss seems at another point to be sin. As a position (that is, as one not with God but separate from God) this seems clear. However, as a deed (that is, sin as 'something' done, an activity which has the result of separating oneself from God) this may never be, for then the abyss would be given substance (as in Religiousness A) and man through an effort of will could, himself, walk across it.

Is man, then, doomed to stand on the edge of the abyss in despair and loneliness, separated from himself and God? As we have seen, this is by no means so. Kierkegaard talks of a faith by which we may float on 'seventy thousand fathoms of water' and never fear. This is the transcendent power enabling us to cross the abyss and be reinstated with God, thereby transforming our mood of despair into one of joy and peace.

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