

Carroll College

KIERKEGAARD'S DIALECTIC OF
BEING AND BECOMING A SELF

by

Dennis Glueckert

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MINNEAPOLIS'S DIAGNOSIS OF BEING AND BECOMING A SELF

April 2, 1973

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This is to certify that the thesis given above has been accepted and is finally approved by the department of

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I would like to thank Fr. James Hamilton for his time, help, and knowledge. Without his help this paper could not have been written.

[Faint handwritten signatures and text, including "Department Head" and "James J. Ward" are visible.]

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In the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth centuries, philosophic thought was dominated by the movement of Idealism in Germany. It is important to have a basic understanding of this movement, because it is the soil from which Søren Kierkegaard sprang. He was greatly influenced by this type of thought, but at the same time he was in strong opposition to this movement. Most of his writings are directed against the Idealists to some degree, so an overview is in order.

German Idealism has some characteristic traits which make it a distinct movement in philosophy. The outstanding trait of these philosophers is their methodology. The method of the Idealists is speculation. This means that they believed that ideas existed in a spaceless and timeless world, and man must project himself away from the real work-a-day world to think on this abstract level. This spaceless timeless world, however, is only abstract from the human point of view. Objectively it is more real than the human world.¹

Another characteristic of the Idealist movement is that its scheme is the system. Just as one would say that the scheme of the Greek philosophers was the dialogue so in the same sense one could say that the scheme of the Idealists is the system. This is the form in which their ideas

¹Niels Thulstrup, Commentators Introduction to Philosophic Fragments, tr. David Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936) p LI-LVI

are communicated. After Kant had split the world into noumena and phenomona, the German Idealists were trying to put it back together again in a systematic fashion. They built their systems with Kant's critiques as their foundation.²

This movement reached its culmination point in the philosopher Friedrich Hegel. This man brought his speculation under a complete and total system. His system encompassed everything, and explained it all as a process of history, in which the real world Wirklichkeit, and the spaceless timeless world Geist were gradually moving closer together into a synthesis. History was the process within his system where this movement was taking place. This process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis was all encompassing, and man was only a part within the movement.³

Kierkegaard was the first to radically challenge this system. He used as his Archimedean point a new category, something outside the system, 'the individual'.⁴ Hegel had

²Johann Gottlieb Fichte, The Vocation of Man, ed. Robert M. Chisholm (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1956) p XI-XVI

³Niels Thulstrup, Commentators Introduction to Philosophic Fragments, op. cit., p LI-LVI

⁴Søren Kierkegaard, Works of Love, tr. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962) p 357
 "'The individual' is the category through which, from a religious point of view, our age, our race and its history must pass. And the man who stood and fell at Thermopylae was not as convinced as I am, who stand at the narrow pass 'the individual'. It was his duty to prevent the hordes from forcing their way through that narrow pass; if they got through he was lost. My duty is at any rate at first sight, much easier

built a system, but had not taken into account the individual, his choice, or ethics. This oversight of Hegel is the starting point and central issue of Kierkegaard's philosophy. Kierkegaard became the defender against the system, which threatened to swallow up the individual. Kierkegaard forcefully states, "...a system of logic is possible, but an existential system is impossible."⁵ People do not live rules of logic, but by passion and emotion. He moved away from speculation and systematic philosophy, and he emphasized the individual in existence.

Of course, Hegel had adopted Christianity as part of his system, since it too was only part of the historical process. The clergy never opposed Hegel because it made faith and religion very rational, and it made God an immanent power directly recognizable through the process of history. Christianity's success throughout history was proof enough for its truth and validity.

Kierkegaard totally rejects Hegelian philosophy and Hegelian theology as only impediments to true faith and true

and seems to place me in far less danger of being trodden down; as though I were an unimportant servant who, if possible, was to help the masses trying to go through the narrow pass, 'the individual', through which, be it noted, no one can never go without first becoming 'the individual'."

⁵Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, tr. David Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941) p99

Christianity. Hegel had made Christianity a totally natural phenomenon. People had only to yeild to the force of history and all would become what it was meant to be, including Christians. Kierkegaard on the other hand, says that the spiritual is not natural to man at all. In fact man must work to become a self, a spirit, a Christian, and an individual.⁶

Since the individual is the core of Kierkegaard's philosophy, and he maintains it throughout his writings, it is necessary to know what he means by it in order to understand his thought as a whole. This paper will not simply deal with the individual, but more specifically with the person in general becoming the individual self. Being a psychologist as well as a theologian, Kierkegaard was a careful observer of people. He didn't let his observations stand alone, but related them to his theology. This paper will attempt to describe Kierkegaard's concept of becoming a self, and its relationship to his theology.

⁶Kenneth Hamilton "Created Soul - Eternal Spirit: A Continuing Theological Thorn", Scottish Journal of Theology XIX Vol. (1966) p 23-34

CHAPTER I
INNOCENCE AND DREAD

Kierkegaard opposed those who believed that man was naturally created as a spirit. He demonstrates that it could never be so because of man's free choice of sin. In sinning, man has freely passed from innocence to guilt, and as such cannot be spirit. Now man must struggle to become a self or spirit. Kierkegaard describes this struggle which begins with the loss of innocence.

Before a self becomes conscious of being a self, it is in the state of innocence. But innocence as such is ignorance, because it is not even aware that it is in the state of innocence. The question of guilt or innocence would never arise for a truly innocent person, but only for a guilty person. To be innocent means to exist in a dreamy one to one relationship with the world, where reality is experienced, but not yet in consciousness. The person lives only in actuality, and is not aware of any alternative possibilities.¹ This sets the stage for dread, which is "...freedom's reality as possibility for possibility."² When the innocent begins to be aware of possibility as possible, which in fact is nothing in reality, dread arises from the awareness of this nothingness - the awareness of "I am able". Hence dread does not have as its object something definite as fear does, but the nothingness of pure possibility.³

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, tr. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944) p 32-34

² Ibid. p 37

³ Ibid. p 50-56

For instance when a person is day-dreaming, he can conceive in his imagination of his killing someone. This act is only a possibility, and does not force the dreamer to actually kill. The dreamer draws back in horror from the awareness of this possibility as being truly possible, yet he is attracted by it. When the dreamer regains complete consciousness the possibility does not immediately vanish from his mind, but lingers and haunts him. In short he has lost his innocence in dread.

Dreading is both attractive and repulsive; attractive because of the "being able", repulsive because it is directed toward something new and foreign to the person. "Dread is a sympathetic antipathy, and an antipathetic sympathy."⁴ It must be remembered that dread is present even in innocence, and it is only awakened when the imagination conceives of a sinful possibility. That is when the possibility of 'being able' becomes an issue for the person. The person is faced with his own freedom, but before he enacts his free choice, there is indecision. The intermediary state between the realization of being free, and the actual choice there is dread. Dread is the impotent indecision which exists between thought and action.

Adam is used by Kierkegaard as a model to explain dread in every man, and how sin originates from dread. Adam in his original state of innocence was in harmony with him-

⁴Ibid. p 38

self and with his surroundings. The world and the innocent person are synchronized so that they mesh together and form a unity. Adam lived under God's protection and under God's law, where as in all innocence, the world was one of near perfect stimulus-response. Adam obeyed God's law without question. Then his innocent imagination stumbled upon the possibility of acting in opposition to the law of God. In this moment the realization that "I am able" slowly crept up upon Adam, and in this state Adam unconsciously submitted his will to sin. In other words, Adam was in the state of wonder and he was dumbfounded. His freedom and possibilities overwhelmed him. He was in dread. More specifically Kierkegaard calls this subjective dread. "...subjective dread... designates the dread which corresponds to that of Adam and yet is quantitatively different from Adam's by reason of the quantitative increment due to generation."⁵ Subjective dread is the precedent state of sin. By imagining a possibility other than that which God has given in actuality, the person enters into a state of indecision towards his possibilities. He has hesitated to act in the world God has given him.

"One may liken dread to dizziness. He whose eye chances to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But the reason for it is just as much his eye as it is the precipice. For suppose he had not looked down. Thus dread is the dizziness of freedom

⁵Ibid., p 51

... freedom gazes down into its own possibility, grasping at finiteness to sustain itself. In this dizziness freedom succumbs.⁶

It is in the moment of indecision in respect to the self's possibilities, where the self is impotent that sin comes in and takes over. Man has a paralyzed will, and sin asserts itself in this moment of indecision. Freedom becomes trammled upon.⁷ In Adam's case, in that indecisive moment just before making the decision, when his will was suspended, is when sin stepped into the picture and took over. Kierkegaard is not explaining how sin came into the world. He says only that "...sin came into the world by sin."⁸ This means "...sin comes in constantly by the qualitative leap of the individual...How sin comes into the world every man understands by himself alone;..."⁹ So man in dread is impotent and in impotence each individual makes a qualitative leap from innocence to guilt through sin. After this happens once, freedom is always guilty in making any further choices. After freedom in its dizziness once succumbs it can never arise as innocent again, because innocence and guilt are purely qualitative and as such are indifferent to quantities. So all choices become guilty choices, man possesses the quality of guilt.¹⁰

⁶Ibid. p 55

⁷Ibid. p 45

⁸Ibid. p 29

⁹Ibid. p 42-46

¹⁰Ibid. p 55

Although guilt is purely qualitative, subjective dread increases quantitatively with each new sin. The later individual, due to his better vantage point in terms of history, can see more clearly just what is at stake. He becomes hesitant to act. "In the later individual dread is more reflective. This may be expressed by saying that the nothing which is the object of dread becomes, as it were, more a something."¹¹

In addition to subjective dread there is also objective dread. "By objective dread...we understand the reflection in the whole world of that sinfulness which is propagated by generation."¹² In other words, the sins of man have cast a dreadful shadow over the world, which is a reality for every man. It is only through the dreading eyes of man that the world is seen as dreadful or sinful. "By the fact then that sin came into the world it acquired significance for the whole creation. This effect of sin in the non-human sphere of being I have called objective dread."¹³ Every man by subjectively dreading and sinning, appropriates this dreadful world unto himself. Man's world is sinful, and this state of affairs is passed on from generation to generation. People also become dreadful to one another, not because they are dreadful in themselves, but only because the relationships between people are seen, by men, as being

¹¹Ibid. p 55

¹²Ibid. p 51

¹³Ibid. p 52

dreadful.

Man often finds the world the source of his uneasiness, discontent, distress, and anxiety. Yet, it is just the reverse, man by sin has made the world a place which causes him to be in this state of longing.

"The state in which the expectant man is he has not fallen into by accident, etc., so that he finds himself entirely strange in it, but he himself is at the same time producing it. The expression for such a longing is dread, for in dread the state out of which a man longs to be delivered announces, itself, and it announces itself because longing alone is not enough to save man."¹⁴

This situation is universally human, and it has definite effects on man. Objective dread makes the world sinful. Hence Kierkegaard says that the nothingness of dread (in objective dread) becomes more and more a something (sin) for the later individual. Sin drives a permanent wedge between what man was and what man is. It drives them further apart, and makes them irreconcilable.

"...freedom being posited by the fact that the misuse of it posited it, cast over the whole creation a reflection of possibility and a shudder of complicity; ...this must occur because man is a synthesis whose extremest contrasts were posited and whose one contrast became precisely by man's sin a far more extreme contrast than it was before..."¹⁵

The distance between what the world was and what the world actually is becomes irreconcilable. Man causes this, but at the same time he cannot be the solution for it. Man's

¹⁴Ibid. p 52

¹⁵Ibid. p 52

sin makes the world sinful and dreadful. Objective dread comes into the world by way of sin. Slowly objective dread degenerates into sinfulness.

"Surely this dread in the creation can rightly be called an objective dread. It was not produced by the creation but was produced by the fact that it is seen in an entirely different light which was shed upon it when by Adam's first sin sensuality was degraded to signify sinfulness and is constantly so degraded in so far as sin continues to come into the world....After sin has come into the world, and everytime sin comes into the world, sensuality becomes sinful; but what becomes was not beforehand what it became."¹⁶

Kierkegaard is saying much the same thing as Kant with a different emphasis. Kant would say that man cannot understand or know the world in itself he can only understand, experience, and interpret the world in terms of the a priori categories of the mind. Kierkegaard believes, as Kant, that man cannot know the world in itself, but instead of a priori categories hemming man into a limited world of experience, it is the sinfulness of man. The world gets interpreted and experienced through the sinful eyes of man.¹⁷

So far Kierkegaard has drawn a picture somewhat like the following; the world has been smitten by man's sin and has become forever a dreadful place for man (objective dread). On the other hand man has for the most part forfeited the possibility of choosing or actualizing freely and honestly his own possibilities (subjective dread). There seems to be

¹⁶Ibid. p 52-53

¹⁷Immanuel Kant, The Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, ed. Lewis White Beck (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1950) p 60

no way of ever returning to man's original state of innocence. Man through his freedom has generically changed himself, and generically changed his world. He now lives in the state of dread and is a sinner. His world is sinful and dreadful. Man has permanently and unconsciously lost his innocence. As evidence for this state of affairs Kierkegaard says that sensuality has become sinful, as a result of man's misuse of freedom. Man is no longer at ease with the sensuous, because his freedom has put him out of joint with it. Man has absolutely lost his pristine situation, and every attempt to gain it back only heightens the frustration of dread.

Dread then is not sin, but is the transition as one passes from the state of innocence to the state of guilt. It is the impotent state of man's will before sin. But dread is much more than this, it shakes man from his state of innocence and increases his self consciousness. He begins to become aware of aspects within himself that he had previously overlooked in his ignorance (innocence). His unity has become disrupted, and he has become aware of it.

CHAPTER II

THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH

In dread the person becomes aware of two distinct aspects of consciousness. These two aspects are described by Kierkegaard as:

"Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation (which accounts for it) that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation, but (consists in the fact) that the relation relates itself to its own self. Man is the synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two factors. So regarded, man is not yet a self.

In the relation between two, the relation is the third term as a negative unity, and the two relate themselves to the relation, and in the relation to the relation; such a relation is that between soul and body, when man is regarded as soul. If on the contrary the relation is then the positive third term, and this is the self.

Such a relation which relates itself to its own self (that is to say, a self) must either have constituted itself or have been constituted by another.

If this relation which relates itself to its own self is constituted by another, the relation doubtless is the third term, but this relation (the third term) is in turn a relation relating itself to that which constituted the whole relation.

Such a derived, constituted, relation is the human self..."¹

This definition is terribly abstract and somewhat difficult, but it is crucial to this paper. In dread, for the first time becomes aware that he is not a unity but a synthesis. Looking at only half of the synthesis, one sees the temporal, finite, and the necessary half of man. This is the concrete bodily aspect of man in the world, and man's

¹Søren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, tr. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941) p 146

consciousness of it as such. This aspect exists purely in the time order of things, and it ties man to the earth. It consists of such things as the sensory, sensuous, and the appetitive essences of man. In short, this is the bodily with all its limits, qualities, and abilities; it is the actual.

On the other side of the synthesis is the infinite, eternal, and free part of man. Awareness of this aspect also comes in dread, when one becomes aware that he is free, and he is able to do as he pleases. This includes such things as the emotional, imaginative, subjective, and dreamy parts of man. One might say that this is the part of man that swims on the sea of possibility. But as the last sentence in the first paragraph points out, this synthesis is not yet a self. There must be a positive third term. This positive third term is the relation itself, which relates itself to its own self, as self consciousness. Most important is that this relation relates itself to that power which constituted the whole relation. That power is God. When a person has totally become a self, there is the consciousness of 'standing alone before God'.

A person becomes aware of this situation and of the aspects of consciousness only after he has dreaded. This self awareness is the beginning of the process of becoming an individual self before God. Man in innocence was a harmoniously balanced synthesis; he now becomes aware that

there is tension within himself. He now is a synthesis of irreconcilable opposites. "... Man is a synthesis whose extremest contrasts were posited and whose one contrast became precisely by man's sin a far more extreme contrast than it was before..."²

While the imaginative part of man is expanding out into the possibilities of the self, the concrete actual part of man is anchored in the temporal. The imaginative is constantly moving out in all possible directions from the actual. This is the result of dread, and the cause of despair. When the imagination moves forth from its anchor there is really no movement, it is only when the actual itself is moved by the imagination, that possibility becomes actualized. Kierkegaard calls this movement "double reflection".³ This is the process whereby a person not only projects outward towards his possibilities and reflects upon them, this is only a single movement. A person also must again project his possibilities into his actual life. In other words, the possible becomes actualized by a double movement; first the imaginative aspect of man projects itself out towards the self's possibilities, and secondly, it returns to the actual and moves the actual.

²Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, op. cit., p 52

³Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, op. cit., p 68-70

There is, obviously, strong tension between these two aspects of the self, simply because dread has made people aware of their absolute difference. While the imagination is free floating, the bodily is tied to the earthly. This tension within man is the cause of despair. But despair does not occur in either of the two parts of the synthesis. The relation of these two is the positive third term of the self which is spirit. Despair occurs in the spirit. So then it could be said that dread is man's way of being in respect to his possibilities, and despair is his reaction to dread. Kierkegaard sees two main reactions to dread, and these two reactions are the two kinds of conscious despair. Despair is the result of the tension between the two aspects, and it occurs in the spirit. Despair is the 'sickness unto death'. It is sickness in the spirit, but the spirit does not die from it, on the contrary, that is precisely its torment, that the self is not able to die.⁴

Perhaps a person may only have moments of despair, but this means that it is only noticed when it is brought to ones attention, but it was there all the time. One who despairs has always been in despair it only shows itself from time to time.⁵

There are two types of conscious despair, first is

⁴Søren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, op. cit., p 150-153

⁵Ibid. p 157

despair by not willing to be oneself; the second is despair by willing to be oneself. The first is referred to as the despair of weakness, the second as despair of defiance.⁶

A person has despair of weakness when he will to be rid of his self, and to be out of the tension of being a self. This type of despair realizes the pain involved in being a self, of being spirit, and of being in the tension. In other words, this type tries to ignore the soulish, imaginative part of man because of the strain within the spirit, and seeks only to exist in the one dimensional level of the actual. In this case one despairingly wills not to be a self, and wills to be relieved of the tension by some other power. By the very fact that one wills this to be the case and at the same time it cannot be the case one is in despair.⁷

Despair of defiance is that type of despair which wills to be itself. Just as in the first type of despair which wills to be rid of the painful spirit aspect of man, so this type of despair wills despairingly to be a self - a spirit. This person makes his own decisions in respect to his possibilities, and tries to create himself. He draws strength from his own self. This type attempts to sustain himself in the tension by his own power. He is

⁶Ibid. p 180-182

⁷Ibid. p 182-183

resentful towards the world, because he feels he is pulling himself up by his own boot straps, and finding hope within himself amid a hepeless world. It can be said that the pain of the despairer's situation is his conselation. He courageously faces all possibilities and finds repose in the fact that he is able to do this with his own strength. In doing so, that is, by willing to be his own self he becomes no self, because no self can be its own eternal self as this despairer would have it.⁸

⁸Ibid. p 200-201

CHAPTER III

DESPAIR IN DREAD AS A SAVING EXPERIENCE

As was said before, Kierkegaard relates his psychology to his theology. This analysis of the self is preliminary to understanding his theology. The despair of defiance is where his psychology ends and his theology begins.

The starting point of his theology is the despairing self, but one who despairs is a sinner. He defines sin as follows, "Sin is this; before God or with the conception of God, to be in despair at not willing to be oneself, or in despair at willing to be oneself. Thus sin is potentiated weakness or potentiated defiance; sin is the potentiation of despair."¹

So one who despairs by weakly willing not to be himself, or one who despairs by defiantly willing to be his own self, are the two sources of all sinfulness. However Kierkegaard stresses that, "...the contrast here is only relative. No despair is entirely without defiance; in fact defiance is implied in the very expression, 'Not to will to be.' On the other hand, even the extremest defiance of despair is after all never without some weakness."² So both types of despair are despair of defiance and despair of weakness at the same time, only a degree of consciousness separates them. Despair of defiance is more conscious of the eternal self. This defiance is sinful because one tries to maintain a stoic attitude towards life,

¹Ibid. p 208

²Ibid. p 182

and justify his situation by his ability to endure pain. He will not let go and "...humble himself under it in faith and ...accept it as belonging to the self."³

Although the defiant form of despair is sinful just as the other form is, it is a movement towards becoming a total human self before God. It is the way to faith because the self wills to have a self whereas in the first case it did not. After becoming aware of the two aspects of consciousness in the self, defiant despair is the second step leading to the development of a Christian self.

"In this form of despair there is now a mounting consciousness of the self, and hence greater consciousness of what despair is and of the fact that one's condition is that of despair. Here despair is conscious of itself as a deed, it does not come from without as a suffering under the pressure of circumstances, it comes directly from the self. And so after all defiance is a new qualification added to despair over one's weakness.

In order to will in despair to be oneself there must be consciousness of the infinite self."⁴

The self by willing defiantly to be itself is in the tension, but it must go one step further.

"The despair which is the passage way to faith is also by aid of the eternal; by aid of the eternal the self has the courage to lose itself in order to gain itself. Here on the contrary it is not willing to begin by losing itself but wills to be itself."⁵

This act of giving oneself up in order to gain oneself is what Kierkegaard calls the 'leap of faith.'⁶ This leap of

³Ibid. p 201

⁴Ibid. p 201

⁵Ibid. p 201

⁶Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, op. cit., p 86-92

faith is not done by man alone, but it is a leap by man that is initiated by God. God enters the person's life in the 'moment'. By the words leap and moment Kierkegaard is suggesting a break with temporal continuity. Man with God's help breaks with the sinful world. This is in direct opposition to the Hegelian idea of the rational process of history. The moment and the leap take on paradoxical significance which is beyond all human understanding. This moment is the conversion of the person, and it has eternal significance. The person is permanently changed. "...the Moment in time must have a decisive significance, so that I will never be able to forget it either in time or eternity;"⁷ Faith is paradoxical, and the object of faith is equally paradoxical. They cannot be grasped by any purely human methods. Only God "...gives the learner not only the Truth, but also the condition for understanding it..."⁸

Faith is like a sore, we must keep it open so the eternal can cure it. If the sore is cured in the finite, it is not cured at all, but only covered over by time. Only the eternal can truly cure. The eternal cannot cure in the process of time, but only in the paradoxical moment, which is beyond all human understanding.⁹

⁷Søren Kierkegaard, Philosophic Fragments, op. cit.
p 16

⁸Ibid. p 18

⁹Søren Kierkegaard, Purity of Heart, tr. Douglas Steere
(London: Fontana Books, 1938) p 131

In order to reach faith one must remain in the tension (only the defiant despairer does this); this means one must be a sinner, and constantly be open to the call of possibility. This tension reaches its ultimate when the self is required to give itself up. Here again the self can still keep the attitude of the defiant despairer and find consolation precisely in the pain of existence, Kierkegaard calls this type a knight of infinite resignation. The meaning of the knight of infinite resignation's life is still centered around the finite. "In infinite resignation... every man... can train himself to make this movement which in its pain reconciles oneself with existence."¹⁰ He makes the movement of giving himself up, and he is soothed by the pain of what he did. Beyond this is the knight of faith, that is one who has made the leap of faith.

"...the knight of faith... makes exactly the same movements as the other knight... he is reconciled in pain; but then occurs the prodigy, he makes still another movement more wonderful than all, for he says, "I believe nevertheless that I shall get her, in virtue, that is, of the absurd, in virtue of the fact that with God all things are possible." The absurd is not one of the factors which can be discriminated within the proper compass of the understanding;"¹¹

He realizes that by human courage alone and by a movement in the will one can renounce one's life, but only by faith, by virtue of the absurd, can one give himself up and at the same time expect himself back again. This second movement

¹⁰Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, tr. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941) p 56

¹¹Ibid. p 57

is beyond all human reasoning, it is paradox religion, and it is double reflection at its ultimate.

Just as with Abraham, the father of faith, he had to set his human reason aside, and give up the content and meaning of his life, in the person of Isaac, in order to receive him back again. There can be no doubt that he dreaded this, but he did not despair over it; he humbled himself and accepted it.

"A purely human courage is required to renounce the whole of the temporal to gain the eternal; but this I gain and to all eternity I cannot renounce it- that is a self-contradiction. But a paradoxical and humble courage is required to grasp the whole of the temporal by virtue of the absurd, and this the courage of faith. By faith Abraham did not renounce his claim upon Isaac, but by faith he got Isaac."¹²

In giving his son up, he expected him back at the same time. This can be done in faith, that is, by virtue of the absurd. This is faith which Kierkegaard defines as, "...by relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself is grounded transparently in the power which constituted it."¹³

If a person is in the tension by being a defiant despairer, he also must be in the state of dread. Dread, for Kierkegaard, is extremely dialectical. So far only one side of dread has been presented. A closer look at dread must be taken in order to see how dread can be a saving experience.

¹²Ibid. p 59

¹³Søren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, op. cit., p 262

Dread is not sin, but it is the transition which takes place when one passes from innocence to guilt and from freedom to sin. Sin and guilt commonly arise from the fact that one is in dread. This is not necessary however. Dread always precedes sin, but sin doesn't always necessarily follow from dread.

Dread can be a saving experience by means of faith. For the natural man dread is a terrifying experience. Faith can make one realize that possibility can be a much heavier burden to bear than actuality. Nobody in actuality is as bad off as he possibly could be, and this can be seen because people actually do dread what could possibly happen to them. The natural man builds up protection against the fact that undesirable possibilities are possible, but this is always only taking refuge from dread in the finite. By means of faith, man experiences dread and takes no refuge from dread, on the contrary, for by not taking refuge in the finite one gains infinity. "Without risk there is no faith. Faith is swimming with seventy thousand fathoms beneath you."¹⁴

People attempt to overcome dread by themselves, yet they forget that they themselves are the source of dread. The only solution for dread is to dread, this is beyond the purely human. In other words, man must realize that he is

¹⁴H. A. Nielsen, The Visages of Adam, (New York: Random House, 1968) p 305

the cause of dread, but he cannot be the solution.

Just by the fact that possibility is possible it is dreadful, and by dreading it, it loses its dreadfulness. In dreading one must be willing to give up all finite expectations and securities. All finite things will come and go, and therefore man cannot place his hope in his finite world. One must be willing to give everything up in possibility, and by doing this one gains infinity. Just as one becomes immune against poison by taking poison so too the cure for dread is to open oneself up to dread. By doing this possibility is no longer dreadful.

"...he who is educated by possibility remains with dread, does not allow himself to be deceived by its countless counterfeits, he recalls the past precisely; then at last the attacks of dread, though they are fearful, are not such that he flees from them. For him dread becomes a serviceable spirit which against its will it craftily insinuates that it has invented a new instrument of torture far more terrible than anything employed before, he does not recoil, still less does he attempt to hold it off with clamor and noise, but he bids it welcome, he hails it solemnly, as Socrates solemnly flourished the poisoned goblet, he shuts himself up with it, he says, as a patient says to the surgeon when a painful operation is about to begin, "Now I am ready." Then dread enters into his soul and searches it thoroughly, constraining out of him all the finite and petty, and leading him hence whither he would go"¹⁵

In other words when a man holds nothing finitely possible as being able to cause dread he gains infinity, but the only way this is possible is through the dreading of possibility.

¹⁵Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, op. cit., p 142

Dread is Anfechtung (a trial of temptation) in which man can either take refuge in the finite or sustain dread and gain infinity.¹⁶ By taking refuge in the finite, dread is not overcome; it is only hidden for periods of time. Closing oneself off from possibility is what makes possibility dreadful. By continually dreading, dread eradicates itself. Opening oneself up to dread, and letting all dreadful possibilities search through oneself, dread loses its dreadfulness, if it is ignored it remains dreadful. Dread is its own cure. Only by truly dreading possibility can a person be lead out of dread to faith. All finite security can be threatened by possibility, but faith can never be threatened by possibility because it has already dreaded all possibilities. A self completely open to dread in the tension, becomes a Christian self, by the leap of faith in the moment.

¹⁶Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, op. cit., p 410

CHAPTER IV

THE SPHERES OF EXISTENCE

Kierkegaard approaches the same problem (that of becoming a self) from a more descriptive point of view, from what he calls the spheres of existence of the stages on life's way.¹ This gives the reader a view of three different distinct Weltanschauungs within the process of becoming an individual; the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. He descriptively analyzes how men who exist in these degrees of consciousness view such things as suffering, duty, pleasure and so on. Two things must be kept in mind when looking at the spheres. First, these spheres are not arranged in any chronological order, they are merely different view points from within the process. Secondly, these spheres are not mutually exclusive of one another. People may exist in more than one sphere at any one time. In fact a Christian must exist in more than one at a time.

A self in the aesthetic sphere is an egoist whose main concern is pleasure. There are no guide lines in the pursuit of pleasure by the aesthetic person. No sense of community exists for the self who exists in this sphere, and obviously no sense of duty towards oneself or one's fellow man. This person's attitude towards life is determined by the categories pleasurable/unpleasurable or fortunate/unfortunate. He tries to satisfy himself in the category

¹For a more detailed account of the spheres see Søren Kierkegaard's Stages on Life's Way, tr. Walter Lowrie (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), and again in Concluding Unscientific Postscript op. cit. pp 225-267

of the pleasurable. This person lives in the immediate and avoids all things which are unpleasurable. Suffering is avoided at all costs. No continuity is sought for in this person's life, and no long range goals can be sustained. In terms of the synthesis, this is a person whose imaginative aspect is active in seeking pleasure and moves the actual self towards that end only. Life becomes an experiment or testing ground for the aesthetic person. The person here is in unconscious despair, or has defiantly chosen a pleasure seeking self. There is no tension in the self. The person acts as if he were not a self or spirit.

A self in the ethical sphere is a universal man. This is a person who adopts the universal ethical duty as his own personal values. The fulfillment of the ethical duty is the main concern of this person. His categories are success/failure. He feels strong ties to a community, and his duty towards his community. He is different from the aesthetic person because he is not simply experimenting with possibilities. He has chosen himself and his way of life. In choosing, he is conscious of the effect of his choice on the community. The telos of this person's life is the fulfillment of the ethical. By the ethical Kierkegaard understands the categorical imperative of Kant, that is, the principles I use for my criterion in judging and choosing must be applicable for every person in all situations. In terms of the synthesis, this is the time when the self actualizes it-

self through possibility; the actualization of the self is in the universally human. Here is where conscious despair often begins. The self is actualized, and there is tension between one's duty and one's own self interest; or between what one has chosen and what one was before the choice.

Kierkegaard takes this sphere to its extreme, showing that as in the case of Abraham, the father of faith, one finds a religious person, but an unethical person. This means that the ethical stage is important, but the religious stage is beyond this. In fact, it was a temptation for Abraham to simply be ethical rather than a truly religious person. Not only that, but the ethical law can only condemn; salvation is only gained through repentance which is outside the realm of ethics. The ethical has its limits because it can only condemn. To leave this sphere and go beyond to the religious is a movement which causes greater despair in the individual, because the tension within the self becomes greater. There are two types of religion; religion A, and religion B.²

Religion A is beyond the ethical because a person here realizes that life is more than a duty towards community, rather each individual stands alone before God. Here as in the aesthetic sphere there is no sense of community, but the difference lies in the fact that here suffering is not

²Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, op. cit., pp 493-520

looked upon as some external misfortune, rather as the direct result of the internal tension within the self. This type of religion exists even in paganism because it fails to recognize the true paradox of the 'moment' as does true Christianity. "...in time the individual recollects that he is eternal..."³ It is the religion of the egoist. "... Religion A is the individual's own self-definition and self transformation of existence, before God; this is so because it is a dialectic of immanence, where the individual in time comes into contact with God, not in time but in the self."⁴ The temporal and worldly orders are seen as segments of the eternal, and the passage of time is not only a movement for man, but it is also a movement in eternity. In this way one can participate in Eternity by participating in the temporal and worldly.

Religion B is true paradox religion. It is the religion of transcendence. The main difference between the two is that in religion A a person discovers the eternal within his own self through reflection, but religion B believes in the paradox, the eternal entering time in the moment by double reflection.

"For as the eternal came into the world at a moment of time, the existing individual does not in the course of time come into relation with the eternal and think about it- this is A- but in time it comes into re-

³Ibid. p 186

⁴J. Weldon Smith "Religion A/Religion B", Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. XV-XVI (1962) pp 245-265

lation with the eternal in time; so that the relation is within time, and this relationship conflicts equally with all thinking, whether one reflects upon the individual or upon the Deity."⁵

Religion A believes that time is part of eternity.

Religion A does not see this as a paradox, since it can be grasped by human reason. Religion B on the other hand sees the eternal entering time at a specific point in time. In other words, God becomes man in the person of Jesus Christ. This is paradox Christianity. Time and eternity are seen as two lines with only one point in common- the paradoxical moment.

Kierkegaard's paradox Christianity deserves a closer inspection. The dialectic faith of Christianity is the culmination of Kierkegaard's thought. The central issue here is sin. This is the point where man breaks with immanence, and enters into the religion of transcendence (Religion B). The despair of defiance (sin) is the point in the process of becoming a self that the person first becomes aware of his infinite self.

Sin is the state of being in error by reason of one's own guilt. Guilt is the quality of freedom after dread. People in general are guilty and can become aware of this on their own power. Guilt is something immanent and can be dealt with in psychology. It is only with sin, and the consciousness of it, that the breach with immanence begins. Sin cannot be dealt with in psychology and a person cannot

⁵Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, op. cit. p 506

realize his sinfulness by his own power. Guilt is universally human, sin however, is known only in Christianity. This means that sin is a privilege of Christians, and only by being a sinner (despair of defiance) can a person be saved. Only God can help one to become conscious of his sinfulness. This occurs in the moment of conversion. Just as it is a paradox that Christ entered time at a specific moment so in the same sense God enters the sinners life at a specific moment. The person becomes a sinner and a Christian, only through the power of God in the moment.

So a person must be a sinner to be saved, but only with God's help can a person realize his sinfulness. Man in the universal state of guilt cannot by his own power believe in the paradox of Jesus Christ; it is only when God supplies man with the condition for believing that he can believe. In supplying this condition for man, God also supplies man with sin-consciousness, that is, man becomes aware that he is a sinner only through the power of God.

"Hence the individual is unable to acquire Sin-consciousness by himself, as he can guilt-consciousness; for in guilt consciousness the identity of the subject with himself is preserved, and guilt-consciousness is an alteration of the subject within himself; sin-consciousness on the other hand, is an alteration of the very subject himself, which shows that outside of the individual that power must be which makes clear to him the fact that in coming into life he has become other than he was, he has become a sinner. This power is the Deity in time."⁶

⁶Ibid. p 517

This stresses the fact that faith and the object of faith are beyond all human understanding, they cannot be the objects of reason. By faith and faith alone is man saved.

"To have sin--consciousness, then, means realizing what the quality of sin is (considering, with St. Anselm, its heavy weight!), and this entails making the breach with immanence. The individual has to renounce the belief that he has within himself, on the strength of his belonging to the humane in general, access to the divine. He has to discover that the leap into sin has to be reversed, and that a second leap is impossible except through the saving action of God in his act of grace which is known as the Incarnation. And this is true Christianity: to become an individual before the God who cannot be found until he reveals himself."⁷

When God reveals himself, the individual is converted. He is then a Christian, but Kierkegaard stresses that being a Christian means only becoming a Christian. The struggle never ends. The self is then "...grounded transparently in that power which constituted him..."⁸

⁷Kenneth Hamilton; "Kierkegaard on Sin", The Scottish Journal of Theology, op. cit., p 299

⁸Søren Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, op. cit., p 262

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The question that the reader, hiin Enkelte (solitary individual), of Kierkegaard must answer is what relevance does Kierkegaard have today. Kierkegaard through his emotional and passionate style of writing has attracted many individuals. He writes with such force that the reader is nearly hypnotized, and many people follow him religiously, and accept ideas that would otherwise seem ridiculous to them. Often times the complexity of his style is part of the trance he casts upon his readers. His writings are directed so pointedly at the passions and emotions of man that reason is disregarded. One must break from the spell of this emotional attraction, and try to evaluate somewhat objectively just what he is saying.

First, he is against theories which claim to be all-encompassing, such as Hegel's. As an alternative he moves to the other extreme and claims that "subjectivity is truth". This means that everything must be relative to each individual.

Secondly, he is opposed to speculation, logic, and reason used by the Idealists. Here again he moves one-hundred eighty degrees from the position which he is opposing. He stresses the total irrationality of faith. Man is saved by virtue of the absurd.

Thirdly, community worship and religion are totally rejected by Kierkegaard. Instead he says that each individual stands alone before God. No individual can help another in matters of faith.

These are the most central ideas of his philosophy.

There are many more, but they all follow somewhat the same pattern as above. In all of these cases Kierkegaard is trying to be, what he felt was the total purpose of his authorship, -a corrective. He felt he was a corrective against the speculative metaphysics of the German Idealists. This is acceptable, but what alternatives does he offer to replace the speculation of the Idealists? This is where the criticism must be directed.

Kierkegaard claims to have destroyed the system of Hegel, and provided each individual with the opportunity to select his own alternative. Yet he has provided alternatives which are unacceptable to man as a social creature. He would want man to turn from a rational animal into a passionate animal. Everyone would be totally subjective; everything would be relative among people, and there could be no sense of community.

So one must be discreet in reading Kierkegaard. He can be accepted as a corrective, but one must be careful not to fall into his spell and accept the doctrine of the individual that he preaches. If one accepts him for what he is, a corrective, then one becomes aware of what Jaspers has called "the thorn he stuck in our consciences."¹

¹David E. Roberts, Existentialism and Religious Belief, ed. Roger Hazelton (New York: Oxford University press, 1957) p 142

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