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**Gordon Marino¹, *KIERKEGAARD IN THE PRESENT AGE*,
 Marquette University Press, 2001, 124 pag – ISBN 0-87462-604-8
 Review**

Gordon Marino's *Kierkegaard in the Present Age* is an excellent study of Kierkegaard perception in our time. As Philip Rieff² says „this book moves from Kierkegaard to Freud”, **it is an interesting** and, at the same time, **a difficult study**, which implies the whole attention. Marino's style is intensely personal, but this has a reason: Marino's meeting with Kierkegaard is personal, too. In this sense, he personally claims: “...I first began to take Kierkegaard seriously as a graduate student in philosophy in the late seventies. It was then, the heyday of analytic philosophy (...) I followed my professors in ignoring the Danish thinker, at least until the day when I encounter Kierkegaard afresh in a coffee shop (...) I spent many afternoons in cafes. One of my favorite haunts was a combined coffee bar and bookstore. The book selection was thin and I had it more or less memorized, but one late November day, I spied a new volume, a brownish covered Harper edition of the Hong translation of *Works of Love*. (...) I opened *Works of Love* to the first page. (...) I immediately bought the book and finished it by next day. **Kierkegaard's words worked important changes in me**”³.

I think that this is the perfect meeting! As I might expect Marino's book has its source in a deep relationship with Kierkegaard's spirit, and it starts from a confession, as we can see, announcing a subjective perspective about Kierkegaard's thinking. It is not only an informal

¹ **Gordon Marino** - took his bachelor of arts from Columbia University, his master degree in philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania, and his doctorate from the University of Chicago, Committee on Social Thought. He is associate professor of philosophy and curator of the **Hong Kierkegaard Library** at St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN, USA. Marino co-edited the *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* 1998. His essays on culture have appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Christian Century*, *Commonweal*, and many other periodicals.

² **Philip Rieff** – Benjamin Franklin Professor of Sociology, University Professor Emeritus, University of Pennsylvania

³ G. Marino, *op. cit.*, 11-12

relationship, but it is a high-spiritual one. Marino's commentaries are organized around and focused on its major themes: "this book represents a few of the lessons that I have taken from Kierkegaard in the courses of my sentimental education"⁴, says Marino. And I can add that problems like: Kierkegaard's understanding of objectivity, the relationship between reason and righteousness, the concept of immortality, Kierkegaard's *dialogue* with Freud, and others, keep us aware that the author is a very deep-knower of Kierkegaard's works. The book has seven chapters and all of them try to explain that we must "learn something from Kierkegaard in the existential sense of that term"⁵. As the author tells us earlier version of most of the essay that comprise this book appeared in some important *Journals* like: *Philosophy Today*, *The International Journal or the Philosophy of Religion*, *Kierkegardiana*, *Inquiry and Sounding*.

In the first chapter, *The Objective Thinker is a Suicide*⁶, Marino discusses the *antinomy objective – subjective thinker*, which Kierkegaard analyses in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. The Danish philosopher tries to make a transition from the first to the second, arguing that the distinction between them is that the objective thinker has forgotten *to exist*. Kierkegaard holds: "(...) the transition from something objective to the subjective acceptance is a direct transition, following upon the objective deliberation as a matter of course. On the contrary, the subjective acceptance is precisely the decisive factor..."⁷. Kierkegaard's critique of objectivity is written ironizing Speculative philosophy, especially Hegel's philosophy, as Marino sustains. This first chapter of Marion's book begins with a very interesting affirmation: "Dead. The objective individual is all but literary dead"⁸, and I agree with this great idea. It is known that Kierkegaard is, above all, a subjective thinker. Starting from Socrates' *paradigm*, Kierkegaard will start a polemic with Hegel's philosophy, the latter being an objective and speculative thinker. The war between them is to bring forward the category of *Existence and Individual*. Professor Marino tries to show how "on virtually every one of his philosophical pages, Kierkegaard distinguish between thought and existence. Though no theory is provided, it is patent that he takes ideality to be everything

⁴ Ibid. 13

⁵ Ibid. 14

⁶ This chapter contains: 1. Introduction; 2. A Caveat; 3. The Objective Thinker is a Suicide.

⁷ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript (CUP)*, Princeton University Press, 1968, 115-116

⁸ G. Marino, *Kierkegaard in the Present Age*, (KPA) Marquette University Press, 2001, 17

existence is not, namely, universal and unchanging”⁹. So, the main Kierkegaard’s idea is that existence cannot be thought, as Speculative philosophy or as Hegel in particularly claims.

Marino’s arguments to sustaining this Kierkegaardian idea are very convincing. As a reader, I am impressed by his affirmation: “Unlike thought, interest understands existence in and as process. It is in this sense that being concerned about oneself is something more than a cognitive relation. Thought contents have little to do with – **understanding existence is existing with a passionate and personal interest in your own existence**”¹⁰.

Starting from Kierkegaard’s affirmation that “not even a suicide these days does away with himself in desperation but deliberates on this step so long and so sensibly that he is strangled by calculation, making it a moot point whether or not he can really be called a suicide, inasmuch as it was in fact the deliberating that took his life. A premeditated suicide he was not, but rather a suicide by means of premeditation”¹¹, Gordon Marino asks: “But why suicide? Why the suppression of the self-concern that is the core of the self?”¹².

In addressing these questions, Marino is dealing with the fact that, as he notes, “Kierkegaard instructs that self-concern which finds fruition in faith leads us into sacrifices and forms of self-concern that our lower nature does not much care for. Once more, Kierkegaard often writes as though we all have some innate sense that we resolve to follow Him Christ is sure to lead us into dangerous places. But for those who would prefer their Kierkegaard without the constant reference to Jesus, our author observes <<Man has made a discovery... the way to make life easy is to make it meaningless>>¹³. The way to make life meaningless is to strangle the self-concern that animates the question of meaning but that again is a form of spiritual which is to say actual a suicide”¹⁴. And I suspect that this response is indeed the real argument to understand that, when we abandon our self-concern, we lost the meaningfulness of our life, we lost our identity, becoming objective and committing a suicide.

⁹ KPA 20

¹⁰ Ibid. 22

¹¹ Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong, Princeton University Press, 1978, 68-69; in Gordon Marino, *op. cit.*, 17

¹² G. Marino, *op. cit.*, 24

¹³ Kierkegaard, *Journal and Papers*, trans. and ed. Howard and Edna Hong, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1975, 3:346 entry 2993 (XI A 127 n.d., 1854); in Gordon Marino, *op. cit.*, 25

¹⁴ KPA 25

Another important categories which are discussed in **Chapter II**, are truth and faith (*Is Madness Truth, Is Fanaticism Faith?*). The author starts from the understanding of these categories in Kierkegaard's conception. In the same book, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the Danish philosopher, sustains that "any individual who becomes conscious of what it means to exist (that he exist) will instantly become an individual who distinguishes absolutely not between the finite and infinite, but between existing finitely and existing infinitely"¹⁵. In other words to be (exist) is always to become in Kierkegaard's view.

In the problem of the truth, Marino begins with a question which Kierkegaard asks himself: "What is my, Søren Kierkegaard's, relation to the truth? The answer is not long in coming – "subjectivity is truth (*Subjektiviteten er Sandheden*)!"¹⁶. Marino understands that the authentic-relation between and individual and his thought content must be very passional. Moreover, Marino holds that this *authentic-relation* ought to be a *commitment* which has its source in passion. It is that *existential-pathos* which is a problem of inwardness, an existential-inwardness. Concerning these relations, Marino concludes: "pages after pages, Kierkegaard's reader begin to misunderstand – passion equals subjectivity, inwardness and truth.¹⁷", and he is right! What can a reader understand about these relations? It seems to be madness! But the author informs us that Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus remarks that in a purely subjective sense "lunacy and truth are ultimately indistinguishable"¹⁸. This does not mean that Kierkegaard is an ardent irrationalist, moreover, that in a footnote, as Marino says, Kierkegaard adds his disclaimer: "Even this is not true, however, because madness never has the inwardness of infinity. Its fixed idea is a kind of objective something, and the contradiction of madness lies in wanting to embrace it with passion"¹⁹. What we must understand it is that all knowledge is a half-truth, an approximation, and not a total-truth.

But what happens with faith? Marion's answer is that for Kierkegaard, faith is a commitment; it is the decision to believe. "And what does it mean to believe? - Asks Marion – Something more than checking off sentence tokens as true, that much is certain. For the most part,

¹⁵ CUP 375

¹⁶ CUP 203; in Marino, KPA 29

¹⁷ KPA 30

¹⁸ CUP 194; in Marino, KPA 31

¹⁹ CUP 194; in Ibid. 31

believe blindly obeys the dictates of an image of reason. No act of will is required in order to stamp the claims that come with this imprimatur's approval"²⁰.

In an especially thoughtful and interesting and controversial chapter entitled *The Place of the Reason in Kierkegaard's Ethics*²¹, Marino makes a critical analysis of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. He does not contest that this study is "one of the most important works in the moral philosophy to be published in the second half of the twenty century"²², but sustains that "Kierkegaard has left MacIntyre and others with the impression that he did not believe that the choice to live in ethical terms could be defended on rational grounds"²³. *Contra* MacIntyre, Marino will argue that "Kierkegaard does in fact offer reasons for advancing from the first to the second stage on life's way"²⁴.

Kierkegaard let us choose between esthetic and ethic. This verb, *to choose*, is one of the most important in Kierkegaard writings, but "on MacIntyre's readings – as Marino holds – Kierkegaard offers no reason for choosing the ethical over the esthetic and so he presents Kierkegaard as blundering – the ethical has absolute authority, the ethical has no authority"²⁵. I said that the Kierkegaardian category – *to choose* – is one of the most important, and Kierkegaard's book *Either/Or* is a proof of that. MacIntyre sustains that "Kierkegaard's professed intention in designing the pseudonyms of *Enten-Eller (Either/Or)* was to present the reader with an ultimate choice", *enten (either)* – the ethical, *eller (or)* – the esthetic mode of living and regarding life. Hypothesizing again, MacIntyre suggests, "Suppose that someone confronts the choice between them, as yet having embraced neither". Well then, says Marino, that someone is self-deluded esthete. For Kierkegaard there is no sitting on the fence between selves. If you have no chosen, you are an esthete, but if you are really facing the choice, if you already chosen to chose". Even Kierkegaard's message is "to choose to choose", I think that this is the only way to possibility - another Kierkegaardian concept.

²⁰ KPA 35

²¹ Contains: 1. A Synopsis of MacIntyre's Reading; 2. Who is MacIntyre's Kierkegaard?; 3. The So-Called Criterionless-Choice; 4. A Critical Note; 5. The Place of Reason in the Moral life.

²² KPA 43

²³ Ibid. 43

²⁴ Ibid. 43

²⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd edition, Notre Dame University Press, 1984, 40f, in G. Marino, *KPA*, 45

In other words, the controversial problem in this chapter is MacIntyre's idea that the esthetic is not a choice. Wrong! The esthetic stage can be a very serious choice. It is not necessary to stay in ethic or religious world. As an individual you can remain in esthetic world, a world not so peaceful. In this sense, we can think at Johan the Seducer, who is very serious and responsible in his plan of seduction, or at Don Juan who never think to abandon esthetic life.

After this "dialogue", an indirect one, with McIntyre, there follow another interesting chapter named *Did Kierkegaard Believe in a Life After Death?* To discuss this difficult problem, Marino starts with Harrison Hall's conception. The latter one, "reading Kierkegaard as a proto-Heideggerian, claims that for Kierkegaard there was no objective content to Christianity. More specific, he argues that the only way to eternity that Kierkegaard believed in was on this side of the grave (...). Harrison Hall describes the Kierkegaardian instant as a moment of commitment that makes sense and more of human existence²⁶. In the next paragraph, as Marino let us to know, Hall declares that for Kierkegaard, this special conception of the instant is one and the same with fullness of time when the eternal (God) enters time (becomes man) and separates thereby the Old from the New Testament in terms of possibility of salvation²⁷.

Marino doesn't contest Hall's point of view but sustains "that the author of *Love and Death*, has said as much, for Kierkegaard there is something that answers to the longing for salvation. There is salvation but no objective fact of it; or again, Christ's word is good - an eternal life awaits us but only, which is not to say *merely*, in a subjective sense"²⁸. What professor Marino wants to argue is that, after the reading of Hall's book, *Love and Death*, the only conclusion which you can reach is that "for Kierkegaard there is no objective fact of salvation" and Marino adds: "I read for Kierkegaard there is no life after death"²⁹. The problem is that our commitment is only one aspect of the eternity that Kierkegaard encourages us to long for. What then? Does Kierkegaard believe in a life after death? Marino tries to answer this question: "a Kierkegaardian argument can be made to run: where there is commitment there is continuity; and where there is continuity there is something unchanging and where there is something unchanging there is something outside of time and thus

²⁶ Hall says: "It is from this perspective alone that we can make sense of human existence as temporal rather than simply in time. Instead of a homogeneous series of moments with an arbitrary now-point, we have a sense of the present as decisive and the past and the future as significant". H. Hall, *Love and Death: Kierkegaard and Heidegger on Authentic and Inauthentic Human Existence*, *Inquiry* 27 (1984) nos. 2-3, 179-197; in Marino, *KPA* 62

²⁷ *KPA* 62

²⁸ *Ibid.* 62

²⁹ *KPA* 63

eternal”³⁰. This argument can be found in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. In this case, let us take this affirmation as a good argument for the idea that Kierkegaard believe in a life after death but not in the regular sense of the words. Kierkegaard has his own opinion about death. He sustains: “If death is always uncertain, if I am mortal creature, than it is impossible to understand this uncertainty in terms of a mere generality unless I, too happen to be merely a human being in general. (...) The question then arises as to what death is, and especially as to what it is for living individual. We wish to know how the conception of death will transform a man’s entire life, when in order to think its uncertainty he has to think it in every moment, so as to prepare himself for it. We wish to know what it means to prepare for death, since here again one must distinguish between its actual presence and the thought of it”³¹.

The life after death is immortality! For a better understanding, we will present Kierkegaard’s opinion about immortality. Kierkegaard’s Johannes Climacus speaks about a consciousness of immortality; he sustains: “whether the consciousness of immortality is a doctrinal topic which is appropriate as a subject for instruction, and how the dialectic of instruction must be determined whit relation to the *learner’s* presuppositions (...). Moreover, I know that some have found immortality in Hegel, others have not³²” and Johannes Climacus analyses of Heiberg’s immortality *Soul after Death* and Poul Møller’s concept in *Reflections on Philosophical Systems and Personal Immortality*. The conclusion comes to as a problem: if immortality is a learned question, it is not a problem which we can find in a book. In this case, we can ask how can we know something about immortality? A Johannes Climacus answer is very concise: “But the question of immortality is essentially not a learned question, rather it is a question of inwardness, which the subject by becoming subjective must put to himself. Objectively the question cannot be answered, because objectively it cannot be put, since immortality precisely is the potentiation and highest development of the developed subjectivity. (...) The question cannot be answered in social terms, for in social terms it cannot be expressed, inasmuch as only the subject who wills to become subjective can conceive the question and ask rightly: *Do I become immortal, or am I immortal?* (...) The consciousness of my immortality belongs to me alone, precisely at the moment when I am a conscious of my immortality I am absolutely subjective, and I cannot become immortal in

³⁰ KPA 64

³¹ CUP 150-151

³² CUP 153

partnership with three single gentlemen in turn. (...) Systematically, immortality cannot be proved at all. (...) Immortality is the most passionate interest of subjectivity; precisely in the interest lies the proof. (...) God only knows in this case what immortality is or even what is the sense of wishing to prove it (...)”³³. Kierkegaard is very ambiguous because he did not answer the essential question “*is it a life after death?*”. But, after I read Marino’s presentation, I have understand that “Kierkegaard believes in a less mundane world, in a more final judgment”³⁴ and Marino invites us to listen to Kierkegaard’s late journal entry: “There is something very specific that I have to say, and it weighs so on my conscience that I dare not die without saying it. For the minute I die and leave this world, I will then (as I see it) instantly (so frightfully fast does it happen!) I will then be infinitely far from here, at another place, when even that very second (what frightful speed!) the question will be put to me: have you carried out your errand, have you very specifically said that specific something you were to say? And if I have not done it what then?”³⁵. What Kierkegaard wants to tell us is that maybe this life is a test. Marino himself claims: “According to Kierkegaard’s counsel, it is a true and good idea to think of this life as a test in the Johannine sense that can be given a term. Lovers of light, lovers of darkness, self-consciously or un-, we will all sit for the exam, we will all reveal ourselves; but fantastic as Kierkegaard admits it seems, that is not the end of it”³⁶. To argue this affirmation Marino presents Kierkegaard’s point of view: “I want some truth here and I want it said honestly, loudly, and clearly. But I do not pretend to be better than the others. Therefore what the old Bishop once said to me is not true – namely, that I spoke as if the others were going to Hell. No, if I can be said to speak at all of going to Hell, then I am going along with them. But I do not believe that; on the contrary, I believe that we will be all saved, I, too and this awakens my deepest wonder”³⁷.

After this, Marino observe: “we will all be saved” but from what, a thoroughly, esthetic life? (...) I doubt it, says the author, but then again, what is it that we will be saved from?”³⁸ The conclusion is that “dogmatically and the essential Kierkegaard, both the thought and event of death are decisive. Once more, Marino claims, after life but not before, we shall look back upon life and

³³ CUP 154-155

³⁴ KPA 67

³⁵ Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1967, VI, 157, in Marino, *op. cit.*, 67

³⁶ KPA 67

³⁷ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, I, 334; in Marino, *op. cit.*, 68

³⁸ KPA 68

understand its full significance. Death or, as it seems strange but necessary to say, physical death is the door to a window on existence that the living have no ethical business searching for”³⁹.

After all this interesting view point about the concept of immortality, what can I say? I find Marino’s discussion of whether Kierkegaard’s immortality to be particularly interesting and clearly but he does not stop here with this subject. Loving the psychoanalysis, in the next chapter, Professor Marino, tries to find out if *Can We Come to Psychoanalytic Terms with Death?* To answer this interesting question, the author starts with Freud’s point of view about death. More precisely Marino says: “Freud points to a deep and primordial longing as the provenance of his undying trust that death is not the end”⁴⁰ (...) at the same time Kierkegaard personally teaches us that death, or rather our own death is a difficult thought to think of. For example, Kierkegaard asking himself “what it means to die?” answers: “When death thus become something to be related to the entire life of the subject, I must confess I am very far indeed from having understood it, even if it were to cost me my life to make this confession. Still less have I realized the task existentially. And yet I have thought about this subject again and again; I have sought for guidance in books – and I have found none”⁴¹. It is the same problem which we discussed that for Kierkegaard it is not something which can be learn from books; it is something very personal and existential. Marino understands this and, he says: “Already I hear some whistler in the dark quip who would want to remain here forever? But there is no need to answer, for we understand that the sting of death is not that of wanting to remain in this world. And then, there is another so thick-skinned as to pretend that death is literary something that we are unable to worry about for death is we are not. Death is nothing, our imagination must paint something, and so it cannot paint death which is to pretend that we are kidding ourselves when we think that we are worried about our own demise”⁴². Marino’s observations are very real, and in accord with Kierkegaard idea that “death is a difficult thought to think”.

But what is Freud opinion about death? Marino points out that “the idea of death crossed Freud’s mind at least once a day”⁴³. What Marino wants to bring forward is, I think, this dilemma: if the problem of death is not philosophically resolve then, what is the solution of psychoanalysis?

³⁹ Ibid. 68

⁴⁰ Ibid. 78

⁴¹ CUP 152

⁴² KPA 78

⁴³ Ibid. 79

Can this new science find an explanation of what death is? Freud says that behind of everyone's mind is death. After this, we can ask: is it death a problem of unconscious?

Marino tries to make light in this problem. He argues: "The backward-looking language of psychoanalysis makes the end of life a difficult topic to treat. For Freud the real meaning of our thoughts and expressions comes from within and before – from instinct and personal history. Indeed, if we follow the herd of his followers and ignore Freud's positing of the death instinct, we might conclude that the unconscious, which is arbitrator of our meanings, is itself unconscious of the doom impending upon the less than half-conscious human individual. After all, for the unconscious there is neither time nor extramental reality. Unconsciously speaking, we know nothing about death"⁴⁴. Anyway, this problem about death has no solution in my opinion. It is true that there are a lot of solutions, but none is perfect! What the author wants to explain in this chapter is the difference of opinion between Kierkegaard and Freud. Marino ends the chapter with a simple conclusion: "Whereas, Kierkegaard, the depth psychologist with different categories up his sleeve, gave us note on the lessons that death could teach us, Freud and his followers are strangely reticent about the significance of the idea that they have us accept"⁴⁵.

After this opposition in opinion, Marino continuous the next chapter with another one, *Kierkegaard contra Freud: On the Proper Scope of Our Moral Aspirations*⁴⁶. The author is aware that even in this chapter he will be a defender of Kierkegaard's conceptions. He personally says: "in the chapter to follow I shall have Kierkegaard defending what could justly be termed a rigorist ethical position. Naturally, this will involve a defense of Kierkegaard"⁴⁷.

Definitely, this is not a surprise for the reader. Marino defenses Kierkegaard in his entire book and, I understand his position: he takes Kierkegaard in a subjective sense; he understands Kierkegaard very personally. Because of this, I think that his attitude is normal. As a reader, I observe his position: Marino speaks about "my Kierkegaard". So, it is obvious that his book is a confirmation about Marino's personal relationship with the Dane.

This chapter starts with an ethical analysis: "how I, like an individual, should live? And Marino answers: "Kierkegaard instead that a person's life ought to be understood as saying

⁴⁴ Ibid. 80

⁴⁵ Ibid. 81

⁴⁶ Contains: 1. A Caveat to the author; 2. On the Questions of the Moral Capacities; 3. On the Question of Guilt; 4. An Ethical Evasion

⁴⁷ KPA 83

something about his words. More specifically, he often suggests that a person who does not live up to his ideals does not really understand them. And when Kierkegaard judge that his own ideas where not expressed in the medium of his action he signed his written expression with a pseudonym. But if Kierkegaard needed a pseudonym to make the Abrahamic pronouncements that he did, *I could use a pseudonym to interpret Kierkegaard*⁴⁸. This last affirmation is an excellent one! But Marino does not use a pseudonym!

Kierkegaard's argument at the problem "who would level moral ideals to psychological capacities" is that where the ethical is concerned we are never justified in excusing ourselves as unable: unwilling, and so guilty, yes, but never unable – holds Marino. In Kierkegaard's case, moral perfection does not exist. And the author reminds us, that Kierkegaard things Kant is wrong when talking about moral. We could never be strict with ourselves; we could never live in a moral perfection! And I agree with this point of view. Marino argues Kierkegaard's position that "rigorism is only possible with the help that is the fear of God"⁴⁹.

After this problem, Marino puts in attention Freud's attitude about moral criteria and capacities. "Following his beloved Schopenhauer, Freud urged us to adopt more realistic ideals. In *Civilization and Discontents*, says Marino, everyone with an enough ego autonomy to listen is explicitly urged to lower his or her moral ideals to psychological realities"⁵⁰. Anyway, what I understood from Marino analyses is that he makes a comparison between Jewish Freud and Protestant Kierkegaard, trying to underline the moral attitude in both cases. And an interesting observation is that the author tries to uncover a "moralist Freud". But is Freud a good one? In the next pages even Marino will ask a few questions: "what has Kierkegaard to say to the moralist in Freud? What does Kierkegaard have to say to the conscious and unconscious followers of Freud? What, after all, would Kierkegaard have to say to the individual how announces that he knows himself well enough to know that he is unable instead of guilty?"⁵¹ According to all these important questions, Marino claims: "In response to a sense of a moral crisis, there is today, a great deal of clamor for more ethics education. I do not think that Kierkegaard would have been sympathetic to calls for more ethics instruction. He did not think that moral problems were the result of a lack of knowledge or acumen in analyzing ethical issues. On Kierkegaard's reckoning, we know what is up,

⁴⁸ KPA 84

⁴⁹ Ibid. 85

⁵⁰ Ibid. 85

⁵¹ Ibid. 94

and the task is to hold on to that knowledge, to resist talking ourselves out of what we know”⁵². Kierkegaard’ favorite alter-ego, as Marino says, Anti-Climacus argues: “this is how perhaps the great majority of men live: they work gradually at eclipsing their ethical religious comprehension, which would lead them out into decision and conclusion that their lower nature does not much care for...”⁵³. Marino adds, “Sin is ignorance, but an ignorance that we are responsible for producing”. And another question, which concerns the author, emerges here: “But what is the motive? What is so unthinkable about the God? What are the decision and conclusion that our lower natures do not much care for?” Marino answers for himself and for us, too: “Both Freud and Kant agree that the moral life is essentially internal combat. Kierkegaard concurs that the ethical, the universally human, that which separates us from the beast in us, is the willingness to let go of ourselves; in other words, self-denial in the non-prudential or non-aesthetic application of that term”⁵⁴.

In the end I choose a good ending used by Marino himself. It is a Kierkegaardian observation about our self-imagine: “There is nothing in which every man is so afraid is getting to know how enormously much he is capable of – do you want to know? You are capable of living in poverty; you are capable of enduring almost all possible mistreatment; etc. But you do not wish to get to know this; no, you would become enraged at the person who will tell you this, and you regard as a friend only the one who will help you to confirm yourself in the idea, I am not capable to enduring, it is beyond my power”⁵⁵, Kierkegaard explains us.

Making the Darkness Visible: on the Distinction between Despair an Depression in Kierkegaard’s Journals is the topic of the last chapter. As usual, Marino begin with a Kierkegaardian observation that “the age of making distinction is passed” and he adds that “the age of making distinction between despair and depression is certainly passed”⁵⁶. So, the problem which will be treating here is “Kierkegaard’s thought in the relation between despair and depression”⁵⁷. Is it possible to exist a relation between these categories? Is despair the same thing with depression in Kierkegaard’s works? What professor Marino tries to do is to answer this question.

⁵² Ibid. 95

⁵³ Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*, 110f (XI 220f); in Marino, *KPA* 95

⁵⁴ *KPA* 95

⁵⁵ Kierkegaard, *Journal and Papers*, 1:440 entry 1007(XI A 381n.d 1854-1855); in Marino, *op. cit.*, 96

⁵⁶ *KPA* 99

⁵⁷ Ibid. 100

It is already known that the problem of depression is treated by Kierkegaard in *Sickness unto Death*. But we can find some commentaries, as professor Marino holds, in pseudonymous texts like *Either – Or, Repetition, and Stages on the Life’s Way*. In this entire work Kierkegaard tries to make his own observation about “thorn in the flesh”, or melancholy. But the whole attention of Marino, it is focused on Kierkegaard’s observation in his *Journals* about the distinction between “the night of psyche and the night of the spirit”⁵⁸.

It is already known that Kierkegaard was, in his entire life, a *great melancholic*. We can say that melancholy was his second nature. In 1836 Kierkegaard writes down in his *Journal*: “I have just returned from a party of which I was the life and soul; witticism poured from my lips, everybody laughed and admired me – but I left, yes, the dash should be as long as the radii of the earth’s orbit and I want to shout myself”⁵⁹.

It is obvious that for an expert of Kierkegaard’s life, his attitude can be very strange. He personally was aware that maybe in the future he would be misunderstood. He was not afraid. He understood his inwardness, his redoubling life. Marino considers that Kierkegaard is a profound psychologist, and I agree. Moreover, personally I see in Kierkegaard a psychoanalyst “*avant la lettre*”. “Kierkegaard understood his preternatural intellectual labors – Marino explains - as an attempt to say afloat from the preternatural depression that threatened to absorb him...”⁶⁰.

What about the relation between despair and depression? Does Kierkegaard make a distinction between them, or not? Marino says that in pseudonymous authorship Kierkegaard brings depression and despair close together, but there are strong indications that there is a distinction between them. About depression, “Kierkegaard believes that it is something that you can, as it were, be born into or catch by contagion”⁶¹. But what is despair? To answer this question, Marino discusses Kierkegaard’s *Sickness unto Death*. It is known that entire book is built on the relation or distinction between mind, body, and spirit; or psyche-body-spirit, it is a distinction between a spiritual and psychological disorder. I consider necessary to remind that Kierkegaard’s *Sickness unto Death* is devoted to a psychological analysis of the human heart and of human existence. The sickness which is the topic of Kierkegaard’s work is mental; it is a sickness of the spirit. Man is a synthesis not only of the finite and infinite, and of the temporal and eternal; but also of necessity

⁵⁸ Ibid. 100

⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, *Journal and Papers*, entry 5141 (I A 161n.d, 1836); in Marino, *op. cit.*, 100

⁶⁰ KPA 101

⁶¹ Ibid. 102

and freedom. In other words, man is spirit because to be spirit it means to be self. So, in *Sickness unto Death* the *spirit* is identified as a *self*. As I said it is about a sickness and for Kierkegaard, despair is the sickness unto death from which the whole humanity suffers.

I must mention that Kierkegaard's analysis of despair is a great contribution to the understanding of human life but also to understanding Christian theology. Kierkegaard speaks about various form of despair and what is interesting is that no one can escape. It is not about despair over something, but a despair of oneself. The connection or relation between despair and depression is marked by Marino: "In the first movement of the *Sickness unto Death* Anti-Climacus sheds some on his creator's diary and on the connection between despair and depression. Commenting on a case of depression, Kierkegaard's slightly abstracted doctor of the soul writes that the despairing depressive, <<sees quite clearly that the depression is of not great significance – but precisely that fact, that is neither has no acquires any great significance, is despair>>"⁶².

What we must remember is that the psychological suffering can have a spiritual significance. In other words, depression (psychological suffering) can become despair (spiritual suffering) "by virtue of the way that the depressive individual relates himself to his depression"⁶³, adds Marino.

Anyway, what professor Marino wants to make us understand is that for Kierkegaard depression and despair are almost the same things moreover in his *Journals*. Despair and depression are in relation with God. For Kierkegaard it is no doubt that the melancholic individual who is in despair would relate himself to God; he will think that God could not or would not to help him. In a note of his *Journal*, Kierkegaard confesses: "I dared to a party, even the most foolhardy things, with the exception of one things, release from a deep suffering that I had undergone from my earliest years but which I interpreted to be part with my relationship with God"⁶⁴. It is obvious that for Kierkegaard depression is one of God's gifts. This thing is very hard to be understood in the present age, underlines professor Marino. "But Kierkegaard, says Marino, would no doubt regard the suggestion of talking to God out of the formula for despair as an intensely despairing way of

⁶² Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 54 (XI); in Marino, *op. cit.*, 104

⁶³ KPA 104

⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 6 entry 6837 (X A 72 n. d 1853), in Marino, *KPA* 106

understanding despair. As Kierkegaard would have it, the transition from depression to despair is one of making oneself, perhaps angrily, perhaps pridefully, deaf to God”⁶⁵.

After all this, it is very hard for me to find the ideal ending. What can I say? Were my words powerful enough to convince a potential reader that this book is a good one, with a modern interpretation according to “our present age”? Were my words able to convince that this reader can discover here a strong relationship between the author and Kierkegaard? And once again, were my words able draw attention on Marino’s unique stile? To make my situation easier I will call on Professor Philip Rieff, Marino’s teacher.

For me, what Professor Philip Rieff exposes on the back cover of the book it is not only a subjective affirmation but an objective one, too. Paradox? Yes, but when you have under your eyes such a good writer, professor and thinker, it is impossible to interpret him from one side only. Marino is all these things together! “Professor Marino does not descend to severe indictment. His generousities of spirit, and power of mind, make both his Kierkegaard and my Freud equally instructive in matters of live and death, and, in Chapter Seven, in matters of life after death. Nevertheless, the mind Marino calls *my Kierkegaard* - Marino’s inseparable from Kierkegaard - wins over this old Freud reader. As Professor’s Marino old teacher, I gladly accept the gentle defeat of my old man, Freud, by his young man, Kierkegaard. It is, after all, my success, as Professor’s Marino teacher, to be superceded by my student. This book represents in print that great dialectical teaching tradition in which one work of artful intellect does not so much supercede another as answer to it”.

My presentation ends here, being aware that my comments can only hint at the richness of Marino's study. I am aware too, that my simple review is an act of courage because, as Philip Rieff sustains in *Preface*, “*Gordon Marino is one of the world’s leading Kierkegaard scholars*”. In this case, I have good reasons to be afraid. But, at the same time, I know that if I am wrong, Professor Marino will forgive me. My intention was to present his great contribution in Kierkegaard’s research.

Personally, I find his interpretations of Kierkegaard's text to be very convincing. Perhaps others will not, but they do need to read and consider carefully what he has to say. Marino has made a very valuable contribution to understanding Kierkegaard and I agree with Philip Rieff that

⁶⁵ KPA 109

“the reader will find himself buttonholed by a masterly conversationalist. For the time being, dear reader, you would do well to let Professor Marino do all the talking”.