

# *Kierkegaard's amphibolous conjunction of joy and sorrow and his literary theory*

**Alberto Carrillo Canán (Puebla, México)**

Kierkegaard's literary theory is above all a theory of communication, and the primarily religious author Kierkegaard has developed a complicated theory regarding communication the task of which consists in "making" the hearer "aware of the religious", and, in fact, to make of him a genuine Christian believer<sup>1</sup>. To achieve this goal Kierkegaard uses the Christian traditional conjunction of *spes et timor Dei*, but he formalizes it<sup>2</sup>. This formalization is accomplished, first, by taking the theological hope (*spes*) as a label for all passions that somehow imply joy as *liking* for something ("*sympathy*", attraction), while theological fear (*timor Dei*) is taken as the corresponding label for all passions that somehow mean *sorrow* as *dislike* of something ("*antipathy*", repulsion); the formalization is accomplished, second, by Kierkegaard's reinterpretation of the conjunction "hope and fear" as a self-referential structure: hope concerns oneself insofar as it is related to *one's own* salvation, while fear concerns oneself again insofar as it is related to *one's own* condemnation. This self-referentiality is then maintained as the *primary* issue of the formalized structure "liking and disliking". In this way Kierkegaard attains the formula for the passional concern with oneself, and this is at once *the* formula or structure of "existence". In fact, a very important feature of the formalized structure lies in its potential to represent different intensities and qualities of passions and, thus the different "stadia" or "spheres of existence".

Seen from the literary theory, Kierkegaard systematically applies the aforementioned structure to obtain a whole series of *personae*, e.g. the "ironist", the

---

<sup>1</sup> See: "(...) *to make aware* of the religious, the Christian, that is the category for my whole work as author, taken as a hole (...)" (K27 10n., italics from Kierkegaard), *The Point of View for my Work as an Author*, in *Writings on himself*. See bibliography at the end of this paper. K27 means: volume 27, page 10 and the following of Kierkegaard's collected works. If not otherwise indicated, the italics or underlying from me.

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of this formalization see my *Concerned with Oneself and with God Alone. On Kierkegaard's Concept of Remorse as the Basis for his Literary Theory*. Forthcoming in *Analecta Husserliana*.

“seducer”, the “ethicist”, the “doubter”, the “desperate”, the “resigned” etc, and even the pseudonymous authors of many of his writings. But this *very production of personae* is grounded in using the structure or formula in question to define the concept of “spirit”, and then using “spirit” to define “ideality”. The term “spirit” as used by Kierkegaard always stands for a conjunction of *opposite characters*, and the term “ideality” determines such *characters* as defining the *personae* in Kierkegaard’s works. The *personae* correspond, then, to the needs of Kierkegaard’s “edifying” method of communication, which rests in virtuously varying the *formalized* conjunction of *joy* (liking for, attraction) and *sorrow* (dislike of, repulsion).

### ***1. The concept of “spirit”***

Here I can only outline the main aspects of the definition of “spirit” starting from the conjunction of “sympathy” and “antipathy”. The clearest writings in regard to my concern are, perhaps, *The Concept of Fear* (CF), *Either-Or* (EO), and *The Sickness Unto Death* (SD). In the first of these writings Kierkegaard uses the aforementioned conjunction to define “spirit” as a “dialectical amphibolous” structure, where the characterization “dialectical” names the opposition “sympathy” (liking) – “antipathy” (dislike). By means of the second writing it becomes apparent that the term “dialectic” truly indicates an “opposition”. The third writing points out the self-referential character of “spirit”.

In CF Kierkegaard relates “fear” to “spirit”: “one shall not find fear in animal because it is not determined as spirit” (K9 40), but the point lies in the “amphiboly” of “fear”, and thus of “spirit”, for Kierkegaard says further: “When we wish to examine the dialectical determinations of fear, than it turns out that these indeed involve the dialectical amphiboly. Fear is *a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy*.” (K9 40; italics from Kierkegaard) We are here confronted with an example of the conjunction of liking or attraction and dislike or repulsion, and for this reason Kierkegaard can refer without problem to “sweet fear, sweet fearfulness” (K9 40), as when children are both attracted and repelled *at the same time* by a dark place. The point is thus “spirit” conceived as a conjunction of two opposite passions, and the term “dia-lectic” means by Kierkegaard simply this “opposition”.

In EO one may easily confirm this *main* usage of the term “dialectical”. Kierkegaard refers there to what he considers the “medieval” “idea of representation”: “The wonderful *dialectic* of life is here always illustrated by individuals who in general stand *opposite in twos*; life is there always only under one form (*sub una specie*), and the great *dialectical unity*, which life possesses under *both* forms (*sub utraque*) in unity, is not imagined. The opposites stand thus mostly indifferent *outside each to the other*.” (K1 93) “Dialectical unity” means thus, purely *formally*, two that are not “indifferent outside one to other”, but joined together forming one “unity”, and certainly a unity of “opposites”. “Spirit” is such a “dialectical unity” of *passions*.

Finally, the special clear postulate of the self-referentiality as main feature of the “spirit” can be found in SD: “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 itself; the self is not the relation, but that the relation relates itself to itself.” (K21 8) If the “relation” is a passion, then the passion itself becomes the object of the passion.

## ***2. The concept of “ideality”***

The self-referentiality of “spirit” is its main feature needed for the definition of “ideality”. “Ideality” is the *quality* of a passion when it “is (...) put as principle” (K1 65n., 94)<sup>3</sup>, but this means neither more nor less than the self-referentiality of the passion. This may be viewed by considering some personae of EO.

Kierkegaard exploits the “medieval” “idea of representation” mentioned above, through which he characterizes Don Juan as two versions of the seducer. Related to the first one Kierkegaard says: “Don Juan is (...) the incarnation of flesh (flesh becoming flesh), or making the flesh spiritual from flesh’s own spirit.” (K1 94) The mere double mention of flesh suggests self-referentiality, but what does it really mean? Kierkegaard refers to “[t]he sensuousness as principle” (K1 67), which means exactly to enjoy enjoying, for which the concrete object of joy lacks in itself any importance. Kierkegaard says: “It [Don Juan’s craft] is the energy of sensual desire. He desires the total female in any female, and in this

---

<sup>3</sup> Other expressions for this are the “perfection” (JP1 390) of the passion, or the *quality* it reaches when it reaches its highest “intensity” (K4 284). When Kierkegaard’s speaks *expressively* of “passion” or

lies the sensually *idealizing* power (...). For this reason all *finite differences* disappear for him compared with the principal matter: to be female. The old becomes rejuvenated for him (...), he brings the young, which are almost children, instantaneously to maturity. All who is female becomes his prey.” (K1 107) In this sense Don Juan’s “relationship to” “any girl” is “essential” (K1 107). One must take notice of the contraposition “ideal” or “essential” – “finite” or, indeed, accidental. The “idealized” or “essential” desire is the sensual for the sake of the sensual, and this self-referentiality of passion means that its object lacks any importance in itself. It serves as a mere stimulus<sup>4</sup>. Consequently Kierkegaard says: “(...) object of his [Don Juan’s] desire is the sensual, and only the sensual.” (K1 105)

In the case of the second Don Juan we are confronted not with the “extensive” or “immediate” but with the “intensive” or “reflected seducer” (K1 115). This seducer does not conquer immediately, only by craft of the bare sensualness, on the contrary, he uses a method, and is artfully deceptive (K1 106, 115). This presupposes concentration on the object to be conquered. Nevertheless, the object in itself lacks again any importance, for we are concerned here with the “reflected” satisfaction, which is mediated by reflecting on joy produced by deception: “Don Juan [the first one] enjoys satisfaction, the reflected seducer [the second Don Juan] enjoys deception (...), and *enjoyed* is a reflection on *joy*.” (K1 116)<sup>5</sup> Joy is again the object of joy, and the “girl” drops again to mere stimulus.

To “put” a passion “as principle” – i.e. “representing” it according to the “medieval” conception - is to make it “ideal”, and this means concretely the self-referentiality of the passion in question. For this reason Kierkegaard names each bearer of such a “principle” “a determination of the internal” (K1 114). “Internality” is another of Kierkegaard’s names for self-referentiality<sup>6</sup>. Here it is necessary to confirm the model in the case of “the ethicist”.

We are now dealing not with the “seducer” but with an upright “husband”, and at first glance the love for his woman is far from being self-referential, if it really falls under

---

“enthusiasm”, he means almost always a passion in its highest intensity, i.e., he means a special quality of every passion.

<sup>4</sup> See: the resistance of object “(...) has the function simply to awaken passion (...)” (K1 114).

<sup>5</sup> About this kind of loving which is expressly determined by “reflection on joy” (K3 26), see the following passage in the second part of *Either-Or*: “(...) you understand (...) to fall in love in such a way that this love enhances your own personality.” (K3 26).

<sup>6</sup> About this point besides my above-mentioned paper see also my paper *The Paradoxical Transformation of Existence. On Kierkegaard’s Concept of Individuation*. Forthcoming in *Analecta Husserliana*.

“the ethical”. But such an interpretation of Kierkegaard’s conception of the ethical is mere misinterpretation, for he *always* holds the model of “ideality” as self-referentiality of passion. In CF Kierkegaard says: “Ethics (...) want to bring ideality into reality (...). Ethics shows ideality as task (...)” (K9 13). The ideality is attained in this case by means of a curious concept: “*commanded* love” (K17 23, italics from Kierkegaard), which is considered in great detail in Kierkegaard’s writing *Works of Love*. But for the sake of brevity, I shall refer here principally to EO.

“Commanded love” is in EO “love”, more precisely, “marital love” *as* “duty”. A formula for the relationship indicated by this “as” can be found in *Fear and Trembling* (FT): it is the “coincidence” of “duty” and “wish” (K5 86, footnote). If they are opposite, then the “collision” occurs that leads to the figure of “tragical hero”. But the upright husband is not such a hero<sup>7</sup>; because for him “duty” and “wish” (here “love”) coincide: in loving his wife the husband does “... *not more and not less* than exactly what duty calls.” (K3 158) More precisely, the secret of this model lies in conceiving “love” exactly as *realization* of a “duty”: love “(...) *realizes* it [sc. duty], and whereby it does *more* than duty (...)” (K3 158). Thus, “duty” and marital “love” are not identical only insofar as they are here in the traditional relationship of *potence* to *act*. In this precise sense love “does *more* than duty”. The “coincidence” of “duty” and “wish” (in FT) has thus (in EO) this general formula: realized wish (a kind of love) = *realization* of the duty (which is exactly the same wish or love but considered as mere potence). This relationship becomes in EO the argument of ethicist, by means of what the aesthete’s relationship “either duty or love” (K3 160) is rejected. The main point is now that Kierkegaard considers the ethical fulfillment of duty, of every duty, as a task for the sake of oneself<sup>8</sup>, hence, to love one’s own wife becomes primary a self-referential relationship. “Commanded love” is the figure of “marital love” by means of which the latter become “ideal” or “internal”, and therefore, Kierkegaard says: “I hold the *internality* of duty in love (...)” (K3 162). “In marriage (...) the *internal* is the main thing (...)” (K3 161).

---

<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding, he can be a “religious hero”, who has come back to the finite. See for example FT (K5 40), and CUP (K14 181).

<sup>8</sup> Who does not fulfill his duty, be it what it may, “(...) degrades himself (...)” (K3 161). The general formula for this self-referentiality is in EO the “choosing of oneself” as “choosing the choice” (K4 188n., 224), which implies to assume “enthusiastically” all individual duties (K3 161; K4 268), since each of them is not any other thing but a kind of “love” in the form of the potence (wish).

### 3. The “ideality” and the amphibolous structure “joy and sorrow”.

Remember that fear is “dialectic amphibolous”, because it is *a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy*.” Here lies the conjunction “attraction and repulsion” as formal structure, which also applies to “love” as “duty”, for “duty” itself is also “dialectic amphibolous”: it is related at a time to possible fulfillment (good; religious: salvation<sup>9</sup>) and to possible nonfulfillment (bad; religious: condemnation), the relation to the first is formally sympathy (attraction), while the relation to the second antipathy (repulsion). And both, “good” and “bad” are, in genuine ethical sense, determinations of the “internal” (Cf. K9 47, 14, footnote). “Marital love” implies thus a “dialectic amphibolous” self-referentiality.

Kierkegaard’s speaks of “religious ideality”, of “ethical ideality”, and of “aesthetic ideality” (K9 14, footnote). The specific *religious* passion possessing the “dialectic amphibolous” structure is “remorse”<sup>10</sup>. The “ideality” means always the *same* structure, hence, in the *aesthetical* stadium the seducer’s passion of “love” must be “dialectic amphibolous”, too. In order to see this, one may use a formula of *Philosophical Fragments* (PhF), namely “the paradox of being in love”, which means the “paradox of *self-love* as love to *another* (...)” (K8 36). The latter expression involves *me*, *a second*, and *love*, and in this way it shows “love” as mere case of the general formula for “consciousness” or “spirit” in *De omnibus dubitandum est*: “(...) consciousness is the *relationship of which the first form is contradiction*. (...) The determinations of consciousness (...) are three-parted (trichotomous), as language also shows. For when I say: I become conscious of *this sensory impression myself*, I say a trichotomy. Consciousness is spirit, and what is unusual, is that when something in the world of spirit is divided it becomes three (...)” (K8 156, italics from Kierkegaard). The general structure includes three terms: (1) me, (2) a second one, and (3) the consciousness or passion, which links both. One may interpret Kierkegaard’s formula in

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf.: “Good means, of course, (...) redemption, salvation, or however it may be named.” (K9 123).

<sup>10</sup> It must be indicated here that the ethical figure of the “choosing of oneself” (i.e. the “absolute choice”) becomes “remorse” when considered religiously, and so it becomes fulfillment or to choose the good, while rejecting the “absolute choice” is “despair”, and it equals non-fulfillment or to choose the bad. For the relation between “remorse” and “despair” see my at first place mentioned paper.

traditional phenomenological terms, whereby it is equivalent to *a mode* of the “consciousness of *myself* in the consciousness of *something else*”<sup>11</sup>.

The last formula is a structure of *self-referentiality* in the referentiality to something else, i.e. in the *relativity* to something. The clue is now that this structure applies to *both*: to the “ideality” of passion as well as to its lack of “ideality”. The “ideality” of passion - passion for the sake of the passion - stresses the self-referentiality, for the object of the passion drops to a mere stimulus; this corresponds to “love” in the two figures of Don Juan. But on the other hand, it is possible to stress the relativity, and then we are dealing, in the case of “love”, with the non-ideal lover, for whom not love itself but the *accidental* object of love becomes *essential*, which illustrates an “external”, even relative, determination, and not a determination of the “internal”.

Starting now from the “ideality” of “sensual love” it is easy to recognize the “dialectical amphiboly” of this passion. This is the case of love for the sake of love, and as the bearer of the passion is the lover, *he* becomes the true object of the passion. This is a figure of reflexive sympathy or of “autopathic” passion (K4 290; K8 21; K13 246) in which the individual – using formulations in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* - “has reflected himself out of (...) *relativity*” (K14 218). This self-referential liking or attraction is at the same time, *formally*, dislike of or repulsion towards the other, hence, in *Stages on Life’s Way* Kierkegaard relates to it as a “*negative movement inwards*” (K12 506n.). This “negativity” is an antipathetic regard to the “external”<sup>12</sup>, and together with stressing of the “internal” means that the other has fallen to mere stimulus of “sensual love”. This “idealized” love as “negative movement inwards” is thus “a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy”.

A non-ideal passion, e.g. the non-ideal love, has the same structure, but the *objects* of sympathy and antipathy are *reversed*. Such a passion is – using an expression of *Training in Christianity* – “the *inverted* mirroring of the inwardly-turned” (K21 9). In fact, the non-ideal lover makes a movement “outwards”, his sympathy is in this case non-reflexive, while “negativity” becomes reflexive. In the first of the four *Edifying Discourses*

---

<sup>11</sup> For the discussion of this “trichotomic” structure and its phenomenological interpretation see my paper *The Paradoxical Transformation of Existence. On Kierkegaard’s concept of Individuation*.

<sup>12</sup> About Kierkegaard’s central conception of “negativity” see my *Concerned with Oneself and God Alone*.

of 1844 Kierkegaard names this “self-deception, because the meaning (...) of life grounds itself upon *another* (...)” (K10 21). This is even the general figure of relativity.

#### **4. Conclusion. The “edifying” discourse**

It must be briefly pointed out that Kierkegaard’s “edifying” method is *based* on the “dialectical amphibolous” conjunction of “joy and sorrow” interpreted as “sympathy and antipathy”, for he *presupposes* that his reader bears this structure - this reader is even “spirit”! Here applies to Kierkegaard what he says of ethics: it “shows the ideality as task, and *presupposes* that the man possesses the condition.” (K9 139) This means concretely: the “amphibolous” structure must be used to “force” (K27 44) the reader step by step - according to the “aesthetical”, “ethical”, and “religious” stadia - into self-referentiality, i.e. “ideality”<sup>13</sup>. Kierkegaard’s reader should become different personae *in real existence* – Kierkegaard: “*de te fabula narratur*” (K12 508) - according to the mentioned “stadia of existence”. To achieve this, Kierkegaard proceeds by appeasing and frightening. At the very end of EO Kierkegaard stresses the *side of joy* by using comforting to oppose it to the *side of sorrow*: “In regard to God we are always wrong, this thought spots doubt and appeases its sorrow, this thought gives courage to and enthusiasm for action.” (K4 376). But much more frequently he stresses the side of sorrow, as in FT when he postulates “doubt” as destroyer of “joy”, of men’s “joyful security”, for the task of doubt is “to startle and to frighten men, to make existence to tremble under their foot, to make men burst, to make fear to scream aloud everywhere.” (K5 124) The stressing of suffering or sorrow is the main feature of Kierkegaard’s method, and in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* this leads him to say: “A necessary condition of all edification is that it effects the required adequate fright, otherwise edification is mere illusion.” (K13 252.I) The further discussion of Kierkegaard’s “edifying” method goes beyond the scope of this paper.

---

<sup>13</sup> This procedure is considered by Kierkegaard as the “cleansing of passion”, and it reaches its highest form in the religious “ideality” of “remorse”. See the first of my above mentioned papers.



### ***Bibliography and Abbreviations***

Carrillo Canán A, *Concerned with Oneself and with God Alone. On Kierkegaard's Concept of Remorse as the Basis for his Literary Theory*. Forthcoming in *Analecta Husserliana*.

Carrillo Canán A., *The Paradoxical Transformation of Existence. On Kierkegaard's Concept of Individuation*. Forthcoming in *Analecta Husserliana*.

- CF (in K9) = The Concept of Fear  
EO (in K1, K3, K4) = Either-Or  
SD (in K21) = The Sickness Unto Death  
FT (in K5) = Fear and Trembling  
PhF (in K8) = Philosophical Fragments  
CUP (in K13, K14) = Concluding Unscientific Postscript

JP1 = Hong, H., & Hong, E., *Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Vol. 1*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1967.

- K1 = Kierkegaard, S., *Gesammelte Werke*, GTB<sup>3</sup> 600, Gütersloh 1993.  
K3 = Kierkegaard, S., *Gesammelte Werke*, GTB<sup>2</sup> 602, Gütersloh 1987.  
K4 = Kierkegaard, S., *Gesammelte Werke*, GTB<sup>2</sup> 603, Gütersloh 1987.  
K5 = Kierkegaard, S., *Gesammelte Werke*, GTB<sup>2</sup> 604, Gütersloh 1986.  
K8 = Kierkegaard, S., *Gesammelte Werke*, GTB<sup>2</sup> 607, Gütersloh 1985.  
K9 = Kierkegaard, S., *Gesammelte Werke*, GTB<sup>2</sup> 608, Gütersloh 1983.  
K10 = Kierkegaard, S., *Gesammelte Werke*, GTB<sup>1</sup> 609, Gütersloh 1981.  
K12 = Kierkegaard, S., *Gesammelte Werke*, GTB<sup>1</sup> 611, Gütersloh 1982.  
K13 = Kierkegaard, S., *Gesammelte Werke*, GTB<sup>2</sup> 612, Gütersloh 1988.  
K14 = Kierkegaard, S., *Gesammelte Werke*, GTB<sup>1</sup> 613, Gütersloh 1982.  
K17 = Kierkegaard, S., *Gesammelte Werke*, GTB<sup>2</sup> 616, Gütersloh 1989.  
K21 = Kierkegaard, S., *Gesammelte Werke*, GTB<sup>3</sup> 620, Gütersloh 1985.  
K27 = Kierkegaard, S., *Gesammelte Werke*, GTB<sup>1</sup> 626, Gütersloh 1985.