THE SELF IN KIERKEGAARD'S PSEUDONYMS*

The last decade witnessed the waning of both Neo-orthodox Theology and Existentialist Philosophy. The fortunes of Søren Kierkegaard's thought were deeply embedded in the dissipation of these two movements. Barth's identification of his notion of the "wholly otherness" of God with the thought of Kierkegaard, on the one hand, and Heidegger and Sartre's designation of Kierkegaard's concepts of anxiety and existence as the proper subject matter for philosophical reflection on the other, unfortunately pulled the Kierkegaardian corpus in two opposing directions. These theological and philosophical investments in Kierkegaard's thought molded the two major interpretive approaches to his thought, which were followed in both Continental and English Kierkegaard scholarship from 1930 to 1960.[1] With respect to the pseudonymous works this meant that one was forced into choosing either a theological or a philosophical Kierkegaard. The choice involved not only accepting an already established interpretive perspective but also concentrating on certain of the books and dismissing others. The theologians, for example, turned to *Philosophical Fragments* and *Training in Christianity;* the philosopher's to *Either/Or* and *The Concept of Dread,* while both worked on *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript.*

The philosophers and theologians are not to be faulted for this

* This essay will appear in my book, *Being and Existence in Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms,* to be published by Princeton University Press in 1975. I would like to thank the Princeton University Pres for permission to publish a portion of the book in this journal. I would also like to acknowledge my colleagues' helpful criticisms of the original draft of this paper which I read in a departmental seminar at Iowa State University last fall. Some of their suggestions were incorporated in the final draft.

[1] The autobiographical-psychological approach should also be mentioned. It attempts to understand Kierkegaard's thought in terms of his personal history and psychology. One of the earliest examples of this approach is Walter Lowrie's *Kierkegaard* (Harper Torchbook; New York; Barper and Row, Publishers, 1962). A more recent example is Josiah Thompson's *The Lonely Labyrinth: Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Works* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967). While this approach is interesting because of Kierkegaard's bizarre personal history and neurotic personality, it is not particularly helpful in understanding and resolving the complex issues and problems in his thought.

double interpretation of Kierkegaard, because the structure of the total Kierkegaardian corpus itself suggests this duality. First, there is the sharp division between the aesthetic-philosophical pseudonymous works and the more religiously and theologically oriented books, which Kierkegaard, with the major exception of *Training* in *Christianity*, published under his own name. Second, the subject matter of the pseudonymous works can also be divided along theological and philosophical lines. Theologians naturally gravitated toward Kierkegaard's discussions of subjects like God, Christ, faith, sin and repentance, and philosophers moved toward his analyses of subjects like existence, self, anxiety, freedom, consciousness, and ethics. Unfortunately, Kierkegaard is less than explicit about the relations between these two subject matters, and, therefore the division of interest and research in subsequent scholarship was a natural development.

It should not be denied that this division of interest produced two extremely rich and resourceful traditions of thought. But to the extent that Kierkegaard is identified with either of these traditions, their dissipation has meant the subsiding of interest in, and the importance of, Kierkegaard himself for contemporary thought. The loss of the mementum of these two movements, then, has produced an unfortunate loss of interest in Kierkegaard as well. But the exhaustion of these two movements has also provided the opportunity for attempting to see him in a new light, and to this end, two new, and not irreconcilable, fronts are developing in Kierkegaard scholarship. The first one is historically oriented and seeks to understand Kierkegaard's relation to German and Danish Idealism.[2]

The second one is attempting to transcend the philosophical-theological division in Kierkegaard's writings in order to see them as unified by an underlying system of some sort within the writings themselves. Until recently Kierkegaardians have reacted in horror to the claim that some sort of system is present in Kierkegaard's writings and that it can be disclosed by a discerning and unprejudiced eye. Some still wince at the thought but the idea that a Christ-

[2] See Robert L. Horn, "Positivity and Dialectic: A Study of the Theological Method of Hans Lassen Martensen" (Unpublished Th. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1969), and Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaards Forhold til Hegel og til den spekulative Idealisme indtil* 1846 (Kobenhavn: Gyldendal, 1967).

ology,[3] an ontology,[4] or an anthropology[5] of some sort lies hidden in and unifies this massive corpus is finding increasing acceptance among Kierkegaard scholars. Ultimately those committed to this approach to Kierkegaard argue for either a theological or a philosophical interpretation of his thought, but they are all in agreement that his corpus is characterized fundamentally by a systematic understanding of human existence.

To speak of a system in Kierkegaard's authorship is not to suggest either that the writings themselves have a systematic structure or that Kierkegaard's style has a systematic character. His ideas do not possess a logical and necessary inter-relatedness such that the outcome of his work appears as a massive rational edifice in which each book and each thought finds its appropriate place. On the contrary, his books contain an almost coutless number of poetical and imaginative descriptions of the topography of human existence. In open rebellion against the systematizing mind-set of the nineteenth century, Kierkegaard flooded Denmark with a wealth of existential reflection which in quantity and in its expression of psychological depth and insight contemptuously defied the systematizer to work his logical sleight of hand on his writings. It seems that Kierkegaard with calculated deliberateness went out of his way to make it impossible to understand his authorship, much less to systematize it. The use of pseudonyms; the maieutic method of communication; the attempt to work simultaneously on both theological and philosophical problems; the abrupt abandonment of the pseudonyms and the indirect method of communication for a direct method of communication, only to pick them up and abandon them once gain – all this conspires to created a subtle and complex authorship in which there seems to be no final and authoritative pattern or system.

But should we be surprised at this apparent absence of a system in Kierkegaard's writings? Does he not argue that it is both inappro-

[3] Paul Sponheim, *Kierkegaard on Christ and Christian Coherence* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1968).

[4] Calvin Schrag, *Existence and Freedom* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1961). Michael Wyschogrod, *Kierkegaard and Heidegger* (New York: The Humanities Press, Inc. 1954).

[5] Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971). Helmut Fahrenbach, *Kierkegaards existenz-dialektische Ethik* (Frankfort: V. Klostermann, 1968).

priate and impossible to reduce existence to a system?[6] It is true that his original and subtle descriptions of different existential phenomena cannot be conceptually grasped or known. But it is possible, nevertheless, to discover and explain the occurrence and relations of these phenomena. While it is not possible, for example, to grasp conceptually such phenomena as guilt, sin, suffering, choice, faith, repentance, and anxiety, it is possible to explain why they appear when and where they do in the life of the existing individual, and to clarify conceptually the structure of existence which makes them possible. *Thus, in speaking of a system in Kierkegaard's thought I mean at best only the conceptual clarification of these structures which, on the one hand, makes these existential phenomena possible and, on the other, binds them into an explicit unity of relations*[7].

One of the most explicit references to the presence and importance of such a structure in human existence appears in *Stages on Life's Way*.

> There are three existence-spheres: the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. The metaphysical is abstraction; there is no man who exists metaphysically. The metaphysical, ontology, "is" but does not "exist"; for when it exists it is in the aesthetic in the ethical, in the religious, and when it "is" it is the abstraction of or the "prius" for the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious.[8]

It is true that Kierkegaard is less concerned to delineate this ontological structure than he is to describe the various existential ways of being which it makes possible, but it is, nevertheless, present in his writings and essential to his total project.

[6] "An existential system is impossible." Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 107.

[7] It should be noted here that those scholars who have broken free of the bias against discussing the inter-relations of the stages of existence, instead of viewing them as autonomous spheres of existence which are not dialectically related, still have not gotten to the heart of the problem. The question remains as to why there are only three major stages and not six or twelve. Any attempt to grasp the systematic pulse governing the authorship must also account for the stages themselves. It is not enough to explain each existential phenomenon in terms of its presence in one of the stages, nor is it sufficient to demonstrate the dialectical relations of the stages. One must go a step further and disclose the ontological foundation of the stages themselves. For an excellent analysis of the developmental character of the three stages, see Regis Jolivet, *Introduction to Kierkegaard* (London: Frederick Muller, Ltd., 1950).

[8] Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p. 430.

It appears that his lack of emphasis on the ontological question can be attributed to his reaction to what he regarded as an over-emphasis on the question of being to the exclusion of the question of human existence in Hegelian metaphysics.[9] Kierkegaard reminds us over and over that his writings have primarily an edifying intention. He addresses his books to the existing individual in order to help him to come to terms with his own existence. His writings have an openly therapeutic quality about them, in that they are intended to assist his reader to overcome the spiritual sickness of despair, which he refers to as "the sickness unto death". Kierkegaard's pre-eminent concern is not to lead his reader through an ontological maze like Hegel's *Logic* but to lead him out of despair into the light of a spiritually healthy existence. For this reason alone, then, ontology has a low priority in his writings.

This strategic disagreement with the Hegelians over the relative importance of ontology is supplemented also by a substantive disagreement. Kierkegaard wrote that Hegel's metaphysics would have been one of the most brillant pieces of philosophical speculation in the history of western philosophy if he had supplemented it with one, single footnote claiming that it had nothing to do with human existence. Kierkegaard believed that the individual's pathos and suffering, the "ought" permeating his existence, and the "ought's" accompanying freedom simply could not be accounted for by Hegel's ontology. In Kierkegaard's mind, Hegelian ontology positively contravened that which essentially characterizes human existence, and he therefore replaces it with an ontology of his own.

Finally, in opposition to the systematizing "spirit of the age", Kierkegaard diffuses his ontology throughout his discussion of the three major modes of human existence, which he describes as pleasure, duty, and faith. *He chooses to emphasize the issues of how one discovers one's being in these three modes of existing and how this process of discovering and appropriating one's being is constitutive of individual existence. He is more concerned with the ethical task of existing, understood as knowing and actualizing one's being*, than he is in abandoning this existential problem for a more detached and objective investigation of the ontological structure which makes human existence possible.

[9] The Hegelians whom Kierkegaard knew best and opposed most vigorously were Heiberg, Denmark's poet laureate, and Martensen, one of its leading theologians. Both were Kierkegaard's contemporaries.

Ethics and ontology are then inextricably linked in Kierkegaard's thought, and we can therefore speak of his ethico-ontological outlook on the problem of human existence.

In attempting to interpret Kierkegaard's writing as characterized by this ethico-ontological orientation, we are confronted with two problems. First, there is the problem of locating and describing this ontological structure underlying human existence. And, second, there is the problem of demonstrating how the individual's ethical task of appropriating his being is constitutive of the topography of human existence whose description dominates the writings of Kierkegaard. In this paper, I will deal only with the first problem by attempting to sketch the broad outlines of Kierkegaard's ontology which lies embedded in his concept of the self.

A Definition of the Self

Kierkegaard's most cogent definition of the self appears in *Sickness Unto Death.*

> 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 . . . the self is not the relation but (consists in the fact) that the relation relates itself to its own self. Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis.[10]

There are three key terms involved in this definition of the self *(selv):* spirit *(ånd)*, relation *(Forhold)*, and synthesis *(Synthese)*. In order to understand the assertion that the self is a relation which relates itself to itself, we must be clear about how these three terms function in the definition. Kierkegaard stresses that the self is triadic in structure, and he denies that it can be understood in terms of the two elements of the synthesis. The self is not merely a relation of the two elements of the synthesis. If this were the case, according to Kierkegaard, the self would merely be the "negative" relation of the two elelments of the synthesis. *When he states that the self relates itself to itself, he means that the self as spirit establishes a relation*

[10] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), p. 146.

to the self as a synthesis. Consequently, the claim that the self relates itself to itself means that the self is not merely a relation of the elements of the synthesis but is a relating (of spirit) to a relation (synthesis).

This claim that the self is constituted by spirit's relating to a synthesis raises a number of complex questions. For example, at different points in his pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard refers to the self as syntheses of finitude and infinitude, body and soul, reality and ideality, necessity and possibility, and time and eternity. Are these five expressions of the self as a synthesis different ways of speaking of the same phenomenon? Or does the content of each synthesis significantly differ from the content of the other expressions of the self as a synthesis? If this is the case, what specifically is meant by each synthesis, and, more importantly, how are they related to each other? Finally, how precisely does spirit relate to the self as a synthesis?

I shall argue that each synthesis is not merely one of five ways of referring to the same phenomenon. On the contrary, each expression of the self as a synthesis discloses a particular aspect of the being of the individual not disclosed in the others. Further, it is not possible to comprehend the being of the individual in its entirety until each synthesis has been examined and the relations of these five syntheses have been illuminated. And, finally, I shall argue that spirit represents the dynamic, becoming character of the self and that its development both constitutes and is constituted by these different expressions of the self as a synthesis.

Finitude – Infinitude: Concrete

Kierkegaard's most general and abstract expression of the self as a synthesis is his designation of the self as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite.

> Who thinks of hitching Pegasus and an old nag to one carriage for a ride. And yet this is what it is to exist *(existere)* for one compounded of finitude and infinitude.[11]

[11] *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 2 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967–70), I, 55.

Less metaphorically, Kierkegaard writes that the self is a synthesis in which the finite is the limiting factor and the infinite the expanding factor.[12] To say that the self is finite is to affirm that it is limited by its "factical" being. The self's facticity is its concrete aspect which includes its sex, race, personal appearance, psychological characteristics, talents, interests, and abilities[13] as well as its more general, yet concrete, natural environment and social, political, and cultural milieu.[14] Moreover, the self does not determine its own facticity, but on the contrary, experiences itself as already in it and determined by it.[15] The Heideggerian term, "thrownness" *(Geworfenheit)*, is appropriate here. The self can neither get behind its facticity in order to lead itself into a situation of its own choosing nor can it disregard its facticity in the projection of its own future possibilities.[16] Furthermore, the self, as immersed in existence and becoming, experiences itself as carried along by time and by social, political, and cultural change. One may, without self-contradiction, speak of the limitlessness of finitude in the sense that the "limiting" pole of the self is constantly changing and expanding. Kierkegaard frequently identifies the self's finitude with the world.[17] Here the term does not have a cosmological meaning but simply signifies the sheer, brute, givenness of all that "is" in relation to the existing, becoming self.

The significance of the infinite is its capacity for "expansion" and, imagination is the "medium of the process of infinitizing."[18] Imagination is the maker of infinity in the sense that it opens up the self's own horizon of meanings. Imagination ranges free of the self's facticity by positing a multiplicity of meaning possibilities without regard for its finite limitations. The more fertile the imagination, the richer and more multiple are the possibilities for existence which it discloses and explores. Kierkegaard expresses this point when he writes that "the intensity of this medium is the possibility of the

[12] Kierkegaard, *SUD*, p. 163.
[13] Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (An Anchor Book: 2 vols.; New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc. 1959), II, 220.
[14] *Ibid.*, II, 267.
[15] *Ibid.*, II, 337.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.*, II, 206–7, 212–13, 225.
[18] Kierkegaard, *SUD*, p. 163.

intensity of the self."[19] But the term "passion" rather than intensity more aptly expresses the sense of this thought, and here it means that the process of imaginative representation always outdistances the present existential condition of the self by saturating it with various existence possibilities which promise to extend the self beyond its present moment. Indeed, the quality of existence is most intensely experienced in those instants of passion when the self leaps toward its imaginatively represented future.

> It is only momentarily that the particular individual is able to realize existentially a unity of the finite and the infinite which transcends existence. The unity is realized in a moment of passion. In passion, the existing subject is rendered infinite in the eternity of the imaginative representation and yet he is at the same time most definitely himself.[20]

It seems contradictory to assert that the subject is existentially expanded through imagination while at the same time remaining itself. How is it possible for the subject simultaneously to remain itself and to become another through imagination? It would seem more logical to regard the imagination as that which illumines new possibilities in the future by which the self substantively transcends itself. But Kierkegaard insists that while the imagination "infinitizes" the self, it does not make the self something other than it already is.

It is precisely the self's attempt to escape into the infinity of the imagination which Kierkegaard deplores. He maintains that there are serious consequences for failing to limit the role of the imagination.

> Generally, the fantastical is that which so carries a man out into the infinite that it surely carries him away from himself and therewith prevents him from returning to himself.[21]

When the fantastical becomes a mode of existing, imagination itself becomes the authoritative medium of existence.[22] This is a contradiction because the medium of imagination can well open up possibilities for existence, but it cannot legitimately become the

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 164.
[20] Kierkegaard, *CUP*, p. 176.
[21] Kierkegaard, *SUD*, p. 164.
[22] This form of existence is best illustrated in Kierkegaard's "The Diary of a Seducer", *E/O*, I, 297–443.

medium of existence. As soon as the self volatilizes itself in its imagination and abandons its "strenuous task" of remaining in existence while living in the possibilities of the infinite, it becomes a fantastical self. When, for example, the self indulges in abstract sentimentality, feeling such pity for the human race in general that it can no longer feel pity for itself or another existing individual, then its feeling has become fantastical. Or, when a scholar aspires to acquire knowledge about nature, world history, politics, or culture and fails to understand himself, his knowledge becomes fantastical. And, finally, when the self wills a possibility which bears no relation whatsoever to its facticity, it wills an abstraction, and thus, becomes fantastical in willing. Consequently, "when feeling, or knowledge, or will have thus become fantastical, the entire self may at last become so . . ."[23]

But the task of the self is to become neither finite nor infinite but to become "concrete" in a synthesis of the two poles.[24] "A genuine human being, as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, finds his reality in holding these two factors together, infinitely interested in existing."[25]

These are the most general and abstract co-ordinates of Kierkegaard's ontology, and, it is now possible to begin a discussion of the more concrete expressions of the self as a synthesis.

Body – Soul: Spirit

In Kierkegaard's discussion of the body-soul synthesis in *The Concept of Dread*, no new information about the content of the ontological co-ordinates of the synthesis is added. This duality refers essentially to the same phenomena designated by the categories of finitude and infinitude.[26] Kierkegaard writes that we have "on the one side the whole world [body], and on the other side one's own

[23] Kierkegaard, *SUD*, p. 165.

[24] "Most men have complacent categories for their daily use, and resort to the categories of the infinite only upon solemn occasions; that is to say, they do not really have them. But to make use of the dialectic of the infinite in one's daily life, and to exist in this dialectic, is naturally the highest degree of strenuousness; and strenuous exertion is again needed to prevent the exercise from deceitfully luring one away from existence, instead of providing a training in existence." Kierkegaard, *CUP*, pp. 79–80n.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 268. Cf. *SUD*, p. 162f.

[26] This is borne out by studies by T. H. Croxall, *Kierkegaard Studies* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), p. 106; Fahrenbach, op. *cit.*, pp. 12–14; and George Price, *The Narrow Pass* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), pp. 36–37.

soul."[27] Body here refers not to an extended, mathematically calculable substance like Descartes' *res extensa*, but to the on-going, consistently changing facticity of each existing individual subject.

Kierkegaard's use of the term "soul" is more enigmatic. In the pseudonymous writings and the edifying discourses he uses the same term in three different ways. There is, then, a semantic problem in determining which usage of the word, if any, has a technical significance for Kierkegaard.

Its occurence in biblical passages quoted by him provides no information as to how he uses the term himself. The term is also used as a synonym for self,[28] and this usage also tells us nothing about its technical sense.[29] But the term also designates the "animating power" of the self. It refers to that aspect of the self which distinguishes it in its ideality from its sensuous, bodily aspect. The soul is the source of possibility; it is that aspect of the self which may be totally absorbed into the infinite realm of its projected possibilities when the self carelessly abandons the "factical" side of its being.[30] Indeed, the "power of the soul" should be both feared and respected, for it is the origin of those imaginative "thought productions" in which the self may lose itself when it fails to act.[31] The concept, then, refers essentially to the imagination, and it is in this sense that it has a technical connotation in Kierkegaard's ontology.

The major significance of his discussion of this synthesis is his introduction of the notion of the dynamic character of the self which may enter the process of becoming. Two important points

[27] Kierkegaard, *E/O*, II, 224.

[28] *E/O*, II, 224–26. Søren Kierkegaard,: To Acquire One's Soul in Patience," *Edifying Discourses*, trans. David and Lillian Swenson (4 vols.; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), II, 67–68.
Søren Kierkegaard, "To Preserve One's Soul in Patience", *Edifying Discourses*, trans. David and Lillian Swenson (4 vols.; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1957), III, 7–37.

[29] Both Eduard Geismar, *The Religious Thought of Kierkegaard* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), p. 37f., and Reidar Thomte, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 110, have gone awry in their discussion of the meaning of Kierkegaard's use of the term by treating it as a metaphysically distinct entity enduring within the body, yet rooted in God and destined for harmony with him, rather than recognizing that Kierkegaard religiously employs this term as a synonym for the self in his theological discussions of the self in the edifying discourses mentioned in the preceding footnote.

[30] Kierkegaard, *SUD*, p. 160.

[31] Kierkegaard, *E/O*, II, 170. Cf. Kierkegaard, *CUP*, p. 105.

are stressed here, first, the relation of body and soul (finitude and infinitude) is primordially a relation of immediacy. This immediate relation is one of undifferentiated unity. The two elements of the self as a synthesis of dialectical opposites are not differentiated in consciousness. Kierkegaard states that in immediacy "there is no contradiction between the self as finite and infinite."[32] In immediacy, the finite and infinite elements of the synthesis cohere in the sense that they have not been reflected and, thereby, brought to the level of self-consciousness.

Second, immediacy is also characterized by the presence of spirit. Kierkegaard describes spirit as the power (1) which through reflection differentiates the two elements of the synthesis; (2) which becomes conscious of the self as an opposition of the two elements of the synthesis; (3) and which unites the two elements of the synthesis in an act of freedom. But at the level of immediacy, spirit is only the potential power for reconstructing the self on the levels of self-consciousness and freedom. Kierkegaard argues, in opposition to Hegel, that immediacy does not necessarily become its opposite as mediacy or consciousness. It is a state sufficient to itself. Immediacy is not necessarily mediated as self-consciousness and freedom.[33] In immediacy, spirit is dreaming and, hence, asleep.[34] Properly speaking, therefore, "immediacy has no self."[35]

But immediacy is also characterized by spirit's desire to fulfill itself.

> There comes a moment in a man's life when his immediacy is, as it were, ripened and the spirit demands a higher form in which it will apprehend itself as spirit. Man, so long as he is immediate spirit, coheres with the whole earthly life, and now the spirit would collect itself, as it were, out of this dispersion, and become in itself transformed, the personality would be conscious of itself in its eternal validity.[36]

[32] Kierkegaard, *CUP*, p. 388.

[33] Kierkegaard occasionally replaces the term "immediacy" with the term "innocence" in order to substitute his ethical emphasis for Hegel's logical emphasis. Kierkegaard argues, that as an enduring reality and not as a logical concept, it cannot be mediated *(aufgehoben)* in the Hegelian sense of the word. "Innocence is not an imperfection with which one cannot be content to stop but must go further; for innocence is always sufficient unto itself . . . "Kierkegaard, *CD*, p. 34.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] Kierkegaard, *E/O*, II, 193.

The entirety of immediacy is penetrated with the darkness of dread and despair resulting from the failure of spirit to advance beyond immediacy to that level in which spirit "apprends itself as spirit", i.e. to the level of consciousness. Kierkegaard persuasively illustrates this point in a description of Nero's insaitable lust for pleasure.

> The immediacy of spirit is unable to break through, and yet it demands a metamorphosis, it demands a higher form of existence . . . The spirit constantly desires to break through, but it cannot attain the metamorphosis, it is constantly disappointed, and he would offer it the satiety of pleasure . . . The spirit wills to break through, wills that he shall possess himself in his consciousness, but that he is unable to do, and the spirit is repressed and gathers new wrath. He does not possess himself . . .[37]

As we have seen, immediacy is a state which is not necessarily mediated. It is a state sufficient to itself, and it is possible for spirit defiantly to repress itself by refusing to comprehend and to actualize itself in relation to the synthesis. It is possible for spirit to remain in sleep by stifling its internal tendency toward self-understanding and in so doing submit itself to despair.

But with the encroachment of spirit upon the immediate body-soul unity, the self in its natural and cultural immediacy becomes conscious of itself as real and ideal, is challenged by the possibility of its own freedom, and is stratified as a being which is both in time and eternal. We shall see how the remaining three expressions of the self as a synthesis are all necessarily entailed by the dynamic, developing, unfolding nature of spirit which Kierkegaard has introduced in relation to the body-soul unity.

Reality – Ideality: Spirit (as Consciousness)

The first juncture in the development of spirit is self-consciousness. "Consciousness *[bevisthed]* is spirit."[38]

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 190–91.

[38] Søren Kierkegaard, *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*, trans. David Swenson and Walter Lawrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 151. *The Dansk Ordbog* of Christian Molbech (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1833), which Kierkegaard used, gives the following definition of *Bevisthed:* "The characteristic of being aware of one's own existence, to have knowledge of it and of oneself". There is a self-reflexive character in this Danish term which refers to an awareness of oneself.

But the self, when immediately determined, is not self-conscious. It is, indeed, sentient in the sense of being aware of its presence in space and time, but it is not conscious of itself as body and soul, i.e. as finite and infinite. Its ignorance, its immediateness, has not been disturbed by the penetration of spirit. But "the instant the spirit posits itself, it posits the synthesis, but to posit the synthesis, it must first permeate it differentially . . ."[39] Kierkegaard is here suggesting that for spirit to posit itself it must necessarily involve the two elements of the synthesis. To do that, it must first permeate the synthesis differentially in order to bring these elements to the level of consciousness so as to comprehend the meaning and possibility of both.

This differentiation of the synthesis requires the annulment of immediacy by reflection. Reflection inflicts the first pain of becoming. It is the initial invasion of immediacy by which it is raised to the level of self-consciousness. Reflection's discriminating penetration into both the facticity and the imaginative projections of the self makes consciousness possible as a synthesis of reality and ideality. In Kierkegaard's words, "reflection is the possibility of that relationship."[40]

As we have seen, the imagination ranges completely free of the limitations of the self's facticity (finitude). Reflection, however, does not enjoy this freedom, for it retains a relation to the self's facticity.[41] Paying attention to the real (finite) self, reflection penetrates the horizon of the imagination and posits the ideal self. Kierkegaard is suspicious of the unreflected imagination. "The poetical ideal," he writes, "is always a false ideal, for the true ideal is always. real."[42] That is to say, the imagination's horizon of meanings must itself be reflected if the self's ideality is to bear a direct and meaningful relation to the real self.

Reflection disciplines the self by withdrawing its attention from the rich and poetical fantasizing of the imagination in order to establish the self as an opposition of reality and ideality. Reflection destroys the innocent poetical speculation of the immediate self by reflecting the immediate unity of the body-soul synthesis as an opposition of reality and ideality.

[39] Kierkegaard, *CD*, p. 44.
[40] Kierkegaard, *DODE*, p. 150.
[41] Kierkegaard, *CUP*, pp. 175–77. Cf. Kierkegaard, *E/O*, II, 270.
[42] Kierkegaard, *E/O*. II, 214.

But it is mistaken to assume that this reflected opposition is the equivalent of consciousness. Even though reality and ideality are opposed to each other by reflection, consciousness does not appear until an "interest" in the opposition emerges. Kierkegaard writes that

> ideality and reality strive against each other to all eternity, so long as there is no Consciousness, i.e., no interest – no consciousness to have any interest in the strife.[43]

This is because "reflection is the mere *disinterested* process of setting things against things in collision."[44] Reflection alone cannot give birth to consciousness.

> Reflection is the possibility of relationship. This can be stated thus: Reflection is "disinterested". Consciousness on the contrary is relationship, and it brings with it interest and concern; a duality which is perfectly expressed with pregnant double meaning by the word interst (Latin "interesse", meaning (1) "to be between", (2) "to be a matter of concern."[45]

The "positive third" element of the self, spirit, stands "between" and takes an "interest" in this reflected opposition, thereby, bringing reality and ideality into a reationship constitutive of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness becomes then the painful awareness that the self is a dialectical opposition of reality and ideality.

In the closing paragraph of *DODE*, Kierkegaard refers to this process we have been describing as repetition.[46] He writes that "when we speak of Repetition we get collision, for Repetition is only conceivable of what existed before."[47] Again, "there is opposition here, because that which was exisiting exists again in a new way."[48] The immediate body-soul unity has been repeated as a conscious opposition and conflict. Reflection breaks open this immediate unity and establishes this opposition of reality and ideality which, when united by spirit's interest in the opposition, gives rise to self-consciousness.

[43] Kierkegaard, *DODE*, p. 153.
[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 151 N[1].
[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 151–52.
[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 153–55.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 153.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

Spirit's realization as self-consciousness is, then, the initial effort of the self to relate itself to itself. Now the stage is set for the completion of the self-relating task.

Necessity – Possibility: (as Freedom)

The next stage of the self's development may now be stated. Kierkegaard writes that

> the problem is to transform repetition into something inward, into the proper task of freedom, into freedom's highest interest, as to whether, while everything changes, it can actually realize repetition.[49]

Self-consciousness logically precedes the actual repetition of the self in existence. The problem now becomes whether the repetition of consciousness can be actualized.[50] Spirit's interest now passes beyond the activity of consciousness and emerges as the activity of freedom whose highest interest is likewise repetition. Spirit now emerges as the action "in between" necessity and possibility.[51] Spirit is freedom[52] and is now ultimately expressing itself in the dialectical relation of necessity and possibility. Spirit ultimately realizes itself as the freedom to relate necessity and possibility.

The categories of necessity and possiblity are the most potent expressions for the individual's being (self), because they entail the being of the finite and the infinite which is, by reflection, raised to the level of being conscious of oneself as ideal and real, which is then posed as a possibility for freedom. They are the final moments in the self's development prior to its being brought into existence through freedom. The self-relating event by which the self becomes

[49] Kierkegaard, *CD*, p. 17n.

[50] Action is defined by Kierkegaard in the following way: "The real action is not an external act but an internal decision in which the individual puts an end to the mere possibility and identifies himself with the content of his thought in order to exist in it. This is the action." Kierkegaard, *CUP*, pp. 302–03.

[51] It must be remembered that the dialectically opposing moments of each synthesis are posited by spirit in accord with the nature of its development. Spirit now manifests itself as the interest of freedom in the actual realization of the repetition which occurs in consciousness; consequently, the categories of reality and ideality are now transformed by spirit into the categories of necessity and possibility. Spirit is now conscious of itself as possible.

[52] Kierkegaard, *CD*, p. 81. Cf *SKJP*, IV, B 117.

itself now occurs on the level of necessity and possibility. And now the self-relating act yields not being-conscious, but being in existence.

The character of this self-relating act which gives birth to the existential concreteness of the existing individual subject can be more readily comprehended through an examination of the categories of necesssity and possibility.

For Kierkegaard, necessity has both logical and existential connotations. In the first instance, necessity applies to the realm of objective knowledge.

> The spheres with which philosophy properly deals, which properly are the spheres for thought, are logic, nature, and history. Here necessity rules and mediation is valid.[53]

He is primarily concerned with the Aristotelean principles of identity, contradiction, and excluded middle, which he thinks Hegelian logic had seriously distorted by having redefined them in such a way that they introduced movement into logic and thereby became the ontological principles by which all existence was to be explained. In Kierkegaard's mind movement *(kinesis)* is present only in existence and not in the realm of abstract thought.[54] Necessity in the first instance, then, refers to the objective knowledge of theoretical thought and especially to the logically necessary determinations of thought.[55]

Logical necessity is less important for Kierkegaard's discussion of the self than is existential necessity. He argues against Hegel that necessity is not a synthesis of possibility and actuality[56] but that actuality is a synthesis of necessity and possibility.[57] He refers to necessity as "one's limit",[58] and as a "sequence of consonants" which cannot be uttered without the addition of possibility.[59] In

[53] Kierkegaard, *E/O*, II, 178.

[54] Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard N. Hong (Princeton: rinceton University Press, 1962), pp. 90–3.

[55] Kierkegaard later rejects the applicability of the Hegelian notion of "mediation" to history as well. History's movement is not a function of the necessary unfolding of Being but of human freedom. For his analysis of the relation of human freedom and history, see *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 89–110.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

[57] Kierkegaard, *SUD*, pp. 168–69, 173.

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 171.

its second sense, then, necessity refers to the self's concrete and "factical" limits. And it is the category's very concreteness which, when separated from possibility, is the principle of certain forms of inauthentic existence. Kierkegaard describes two of these, fatalism and philisticism, in *The Sickness Unto Death* as modes of human existence which are inauthentic, because they are submerged in necessity and, therefore, divorced from possibility.[60]

The category of possibility is one of the most important in Kierkegaard's ontology. The references to it in the pseudonymous works are very frequent, and the following appear to me to express the substance of its various meanings. First, "possibility is the only power to save."[61] By this Kierkegaard means that possibility saves the self from the suffocating grip of necessity. Second, "possibility corresponds precisely to the future."[62] Third, possibility is absolute. Possibility is related to the self as a morally binding authority. In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard writes that to refer to the self as possible is too aesthetic and that it is better to refer to the self's possibility as the self's task.[63] Here Kierkegaard points out the moral nature of possibility in terms of its authority over the individual. The following passage from *The Concept of Dread* is illuminating.

> If one is to learn absolutely, the individual must in turn have the possibility in himself and himself fashion that from which he is to learn, even though the next instant it does not recognize that it was fashioned by him, but absolutely takes the power from him.[64]

The imaginatively reflected ideal, after one has become self-conscious, evokes a moral sense of duty and responsibility quite independently of the self's own responsibility for its projection. And, fourth, "possibility is . . . the heaviest of all categories,"[65] because, through its integral association with freedom, it is the most consequential for the existential content of human existence. The failure to actualize one's possibility is the source of despair, melancholy,

[60] *Ibid.*, pp. 173–74.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 172.
[62] Kierkegaard, *CD*, p. 82. I will say more bout this in the following section on time and eternity.
[63] Kierkegaard, *E/O*, II, 256.
[64] Kierkegaard, *CD*, p. 140.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 140.

suffering, guilt, and sin. Kierkegaard's descriptions of the concrete existential patterns of human subjectivity are anchored to this "heaviess of all categories". Moreover, the description of "the leap", with its "fear and trenbling", is likewise hinged to this co-ordinate of human being.

But is it not contradictory to speak of the self's relating itself to itself as a relating of necessity and possibility? The thought of possibility invites the notion of freedom, while necessity suggest its opposite. What more can the individual expect than the agony of being caught in an irreconcilable tension between what he is and what he can become? And, in such a tension, how can one speak of freedom at all? Kierkegaard's answer, paradoxically, is that the self's necessity is its possibility. Kierkegaard notes in *SUD* that one form of despair results from the preoccupation of the self with poeticized possibilities which are unchecked by necessity.

> The self becomes an abstract possibility which tires itself out with floundering in the possible, but does not budge from the spot, nor get to any spot.[66]

The self which ventures into "poeticized" possibilities neither departs from the spot of its beginning nor advances to a spot beyond itself. The key is to realize that the task of becoming is to realize oneself, as it were, "on the spot."

> For precisely the necessity is the spot; to become oneself is precisely a movement at the spot.[67]

The self then is dependent upon that which it is, and when it seeks to avoid what it is by attempting to become something it is not, despair is the inevitable consequence. "On the spot" movement, then, implies the appropriation of what one already is. Kierkegaard writes that

> however freely he develops, an individual can never reach that point where he is absolutely independent, because true freedom consists in appropriating what is already given. Consequently, the individual is, through freedom absolutely dependent upon that which is already given.[68]

[66] Kierkegaard, *SUD*, p. 169.
[67] *Ibid.*, Cf *E/O*, II, 181.
[68] *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, ed. P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr and E. Torsting, 20 vols. I-XI[3] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909–48), III A 11.

With this appropriation of the given in the movement of spirit, the self's being as a relation which relates itself to itself is completed.

Time and the Eternal: The Instant

Kierkegaard begins his discussion of this expression of the self as a synthesis by accepting the definition of time as infinite succession.[69] He then immediately proceeds to protest that, under this definition of time, it is impossible to distinguish the dimensions of temporality, because they are not inherently present in time.[70] Temporality is not implicit in time. The problem, argues Kierkegaard, is that the present cannot find a foothold in infinite successiveness, whereby time can be divided so that the past and future can emerge.

> But precisely because every moment, like the sum of moments, is a process (a going-by) no moment is present, and in the same sense there is neither past, present, nor future.[71]

No moment is itself present, because each is infinitely divisible; therefore, there can be no duration, no staticity in time such that a before and an after can be established. Kierkegaard continues that the problem with this view of time is that the present is incorrectly considered as a moment of time. Such a mistake makes of the present something "infinitely void" and "infinitely vanishing."[72]

Kierkegaard counters this view of the present with the claim that "the present is the eternal."[73] And only by introducing the eternal present into time is it possible to establish the temporal dimensions of past, present, and future. Kierkegaard refers to the introduction of the eternal present into time as the "instant", which he describes as "the first reflection of eternity into time."[74] More specifically,

> the instant is that ambiguous moment in which time and eternity touch one another, thereby positing the "temporal", where time is constantly intersecting eternity and eternity constantly permeating time. Only now does that division we

[69] Kierkegaard, *CD*, pp. 76–77.
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 76.
[71] *Ibid.*, p. 77.
[72] *Ibid.*
[73] *Ibid.*, pp. 77–8.
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

> talked about acquire significance: the present, the past, and the future.[75]

Spirit's establishment of the synthesis introduces the eternal into the dialectic of the self's becoming, because spirit itself is the eternal.[76] Prior to the establishment of the self as a synthesis, the eternal spirit is absorbed in the infinite on-goingness of time. But when spirit breaks open the innocent unity of the self and establishes the self as a synthesis, the instant appears.[77] Now this conjunction of time and the eternal which is accomplished by spirit occurs in two tightly knitted stages.

The initial collision of time and the eternal occurs in consciousness. In the instant of consciousness, spirit synthesizes its bodily reality, which is subject to the on-goingness of time, and its eternal ideal, which appears in the future.[78] This collision of reality and ideality in consciousness is simultaneously the intersection of time and the eternal in consciousness. Kierkegaard expresses this when he writes that spirit's establishment of "the synthesis of the soulish and the bodily is simultaneously the establishment of the synthesis of time and the eternal."[79] Therefore, the initial stage of the instant occurs in consciousness.

But no sooner is the future, eternal ideal grasped in consciousness than it slips into the past. "The instant and the future in turn posit the past."[80] The on-goingness of bodily reality as subject to time passes the ideal object (self) of consciousness by, thereby making it past. Consequently, the ideal self is now in the past as necessity and must be again posited in the future – now as spirit's possibility. And if spirit, as freedom, actualizes its possibility the second stage of the instant is established in the existential unification of time and the eternal. In this synthesis of time and the eternal, the self gains eternity.

Kierkegaard writes in his journal that "in eternity a person is not in the succession of time, and being *eterno modo* is the most intensive

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 80.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 81.
[77] "No sooner is the spirit posited [in the synthesis] than the instant is there." *Ibid.*, p. 79.
[78] Kierkegaard asserts that "the eternal means first of all the future . . ." *Ibid.*, p. 80.
[79] *Ibid.*, p. 81.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 80. Cf. "If the instant is posited so is the eternal – but also the future which comes again like the past." *Ibid.*, p. 81.

punctuality."[81] By "punctuality" Kierkegaard means presence. The punctual present is the instant in which past and future are synthesized as presence. This instant is the negation of time in the sense that its successiveness is momentarily negated. This instant is "brief and temporal indeed, like every moment it is transient as all moments are; it is past like every moment in the next moment. And yet it is decisive and filled with the Eternal. Such a moment ought to have a distinctive name; let us call it the 'Fullness of time'."[82] Spirit gains eternity, i.e. presence, as a creature of time and, therefore, it is no sooner gained than it is lost to the past in the on-goingness of time. Eternity, then, once again becomes spirit's possibility.

It is now possible to see that spirit as the eternal in the process of becoming in time expresses basically and fundamentally the task and the problem facing the self. The entire development of the self from its beginning as reflected, through the emergence of self-consciousness, to its achievement as freedom must be comprehended within the categories of time, eternity, and temporality. The self as reflected exists in time and eternity. The foundation of the moments of reality and necessity as reflected is time, while the moments of ideality and possibility as reflected are eternal. But the awareness of the collision of these opposing moments in conscousness posits temporality as the field upon which the ultimate challenge of self-realization must be met. Self-consciousness is the awareness of one-self as both real (past) and ideal (future), and freedom is realized in the unification of necessity (past) and possibility (future).

The importance of Kierkegaard's understanding of time and eternity for an understanding of his thought as a whole cannot be overestimated. The expression of the self as a synthesis of time and the eternal is important in the sense that the other expression of the self as a synthesis are all affected by this basic and fundamental fact that spirit's task of gaining eternity is enormously complicated by its inextricable confinement to time. The self is constantly being swept along in time. Its facticity is constantly being added to, so that the self is constantly a task for itself. But the category of the eternal is equally fundamental, because it expresses the notion that the self is not necessarily lost in the infinite successiveness of time,

[81] *SKJP*, I, 841.
[82] Kierkegaard, *PF*, p. 22.

but is capable of transforming time into future and past which may be united in the present.

CONCLUSION

This is essentially what I take to be Kierkegaard's ontological foundation of human existence. It is the structure which both makes possible and unifies the different modes of existing which he so fully describes in his pseudonyms. The further task is one of demonstrating concretely the relation of these modes (stages) of existing to his ontology.

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